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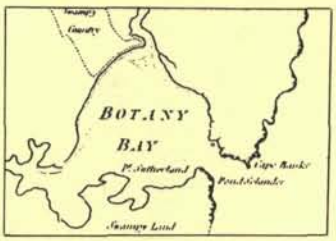

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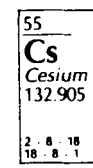

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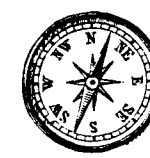

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THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR (ISSN 0003-0937), published quarterly since 1932 by the Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009. For subscription information call 202-265-3808. Second-class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. Copyright © 1989 by the Phi Beta Kappa Society.

POSTMASTER: Send all change of address notices, undeliverable copies, subscription orders, and other mail to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, 1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

Subscription rates: $5.50 a copy, $19.00 one year, $34.00 two years, $48.00 three years, foreign and Canadian $3.00 a year additional for postage.

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CONTENTS

Entre Nous
Aristides 7

The New American Assembly-Line Fiction: An Empty Blue Center
John W. Aldridge 17

Minority Faculty Hiring: Problems and Prospects
John H. Bunzel 39

The Mysterious Allen Upward
Donald Davie 53

Bernard Malamud in Oregon
Suzanne Clark 67

The Great Persuader: A Memoir of My Father
Michelle Bobier 81

John Bartlow Martin
John Frederick Martin 95

An Evening with Louis Armstrong
Jacob A. Stein 101

Assyriology and the Canon
William W. Hallo 105

Retelling *A Christmas Carol:* Text and Culture-Text
Paul Davis 109

The Magician
George Greenstein 118

POETRY

Versions of Corot
Thomas Carper 38

Painting with My Daughter
Ann Hostetler 66

The Thing Worth Saving
David Mason 80

Stepping Out
Robert Pack 92

Needs
Peter Makuck 116

BOOKS

The Subversive George Gissing
Evelyn Toynton 126

Reviews
William H. Pritchard, Gabriel Motola, Neil Harris, David Vital, Clifford Orwin 138

THE READER REPLIES 160

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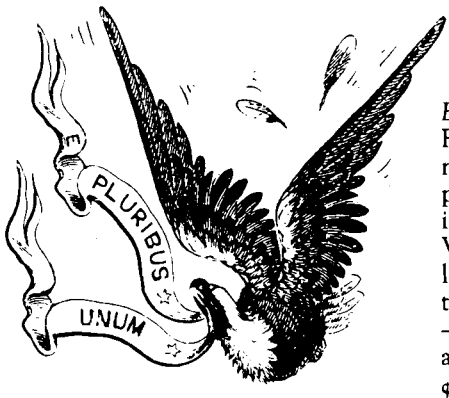

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Life and Letters

Entre Nous

ARISTIDES

Have you a moment to hear the most aesthetically pleasing piece of gossip I have heard over the past decade? It was told to me by an English friend, who is something of an insider in the rather enclosed affair that is English intellectual society and whose word I have good reason to trust. It was this same friend who told me that the novelist Salman Rushdie and his American wife were about to break up their marriage just before the publication of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* forced him to run to ground. To have to hide from your potential assassins in the company of a wife you no longer care for, or who no longer cares for you, this, I recall thinking at the time, was a torture worthy of one of Dante's lower circles in hell—like having your lower lip sanded off while a Gila monster lunches on your ankle bone. But was the story true? Several months after I first heard it, Reuters, the European news agency, reported from London: "Salman Rushdie, the British author who has been living under an Iranian death threat since February, and his American wife, the novelist Marianne Wiggins, have separated." So there you have it: a pretty peachy piece of gossip from a practically unimpeachable source.

Well, anyhow, and other pregnant pauses, this same friend told me that the very left-wing wife of a then dying English writer was having a love affair with—gossip, don't you agree, ought to be bestowed like a small but charming gift, hidden for a moment or so behind one's back—with, yes, Fidel Castro. Forgive me for not supplying more names, but I feel I cannot mention the name of the now dead writer, lest I dishonor him, or of his widow, lest she sue the spats off me. As for Fidel, diplomatic non-recognition being what it is, I gather that he can't lay a legal glove on me. But even without all the names, what I find aesthetically pleasing about this story is that it has all the ingredients of gossip at its most delectable: it has sex, celebrity, decadence, a touch of international politics, lots of steamy matter for the imagination to work upon, and, finally, it cannot be checked.

Not, you understand, that learning of Mr. Rushdie's domestic troubles or of Dr. Castro's amorous amusements came anywhere near making my day on the particular days I was told about them. But I must confess to having been a mite pleased to come into possession of both these stories. Chalk it up to my morbid curiosity, if you like, or to my low and prurient taste. I myself think, though, that the true source of my pleasure in such stories is that they put me, in however peripheral a way, in the position of being an insider, a man in the know. I was permitted a glimpse behind the scene that was not available to everyone. I was being offered the news before it was news, which is the only time that the news is generally worth having. Evelyn Waugh has a journalist in *Scoop* put the same point rather more bluntly: "News is what a chap who doesn't care much about anything wants to read. And it's only news until he's read it. After that it's dead." Gossip, then, is the news while it's still alive.

Most definitions of gossip do not talk about news at all, but instead feature slander, betrayal of secrets, invasion of privacy, and backbiting. Detraction, libel, and malice get a good workout, too. Gossip has not had a very good press in dictionaries, going from "idle talk, groundless rumours, tittle-tattle" (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*) to—considered as a verb—"run about and tattle; to tell idle, esp. personal, tales" (*Webster's, Second Edition*). For a long while gossip was described

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as an activity chiefly of interest to women. Trivial stuff, gossip, for the vast most part, except where it is held to be plain vicious, which in many quarters it of course is. Stendhal once famously remarked that the only thing wrong with ice cream is that it isn't a sin (which, given contemporary concerns with calories and cholesterol, it has since become). But I sometimes wonder if the only thing wrong with most gossip is that it is considered a sin. Or is it the sense of its (usually) modest sinfulness that lends gossip a pleasing touch of tarragon? I think of gossip whose intention is not obviously mean-spirited as sinful at the level of, say, overeating or some other mildly forbidden activity in which one hesitates briefly before muttering "What the hell!" and pitching in.

Very little of the gossip I am privy to is at the Fidel Castro level of celebrity. None of it has to do with show business. Big business and high finance, too, are excluded. I have friends who are themselves friendly with men and women in important political places, though this has never been a rich or amusing source of gossip, with the exception of the story I heard not long ago about a U.S. Senator whose serious drinking has caused his staff frequently to put off callers by saying that the senator cannot come to the phone just now because he is on the floor. I don't ever hear Jackie Onassis stories. No, most of the gossip I hear is about writers and editors, publishers and academics, folks in my own line of work. Much of it has to do with foibles—pathetic thrusts of ambition, sensuality out of control, acts of intellectual cowardice, examples of fetching hypocrisy—almost none of it calculated to remind one of the deeply ingrained dignity of the species. The gossip that comes my way falls under the category of what the writer Isaac Rosenfeld, who himself had a strong appetite for gossip, used to call "social history," a term that lends gossip a bit more standing.

The only famous figure in artistic or intellectual life who apparently eschewed gossip, at least to my knowledge, was John Dewey, although my guess is that Wittgenstein, too, was able to live without it. According to Sidney Hook, Dewey "never gossiped, and although with the exuberance of youth I used to press him hard on men and events he had known intimately, except once or twice he never gave way." Bertrand Russell, Hook reports, gossiped with great enthusiasm. Justice Holmes used to say that to find the general in the particular is the chief difference between philosophy and gossip, which is very smart, yet his own letters—to Harold Laski, to Sir Frederick Pollock, to Lewis Einstein—are from time to time nicely laced with gossip. The duc de Saint-Simon, in his *Memoires*, created a classic work of literature out of chronicling gossip at the court of Louis XIV. Henry James and Marcel Proust were great connoisseurs of gossip and both made fine artistic use of gossip in their novels. (Recall Proust's narrator's aunt, in Combray, who, through the good offices of her maid Françoise's regular rounds in the village, is able to acquire an encyclopedic knowledge of everyone else's business without ever leaving her own invalid's bed.) E. M. Cioran has somewhere remarked that two of the most interesting things in the world are metaphysics and gossip; that they are the *most* interesting, I do not know, but the two do at least share the qualities of being often fascinating, sometimes believable, and usually unascertainable.

The affable Reverend Sydney Smith, founding editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, was always eager for gossip, never more so than when living in the country, far from London or any other large city. He was never above requesting of his correspondents—among whom were several of the most clever Englishwomen of the first half of the nineteenth century—that they "refresh my Solitude with Rumor's agitations." To one correspondent he writes, "I am panting to know a little of what passes in the world"; to another, "I long to know the scandal"; and to Lady Mary Bennet, "Pray send me some treasonable news about the Queen ... and don't leave me in this odious state of innocence, when you can give me so much guilty information, and make me as wickedly instructed as yourself." In the realm of gossip, it is understood, only those who give can hope to receive. "I will send Lady Grey the news from London when I get there," he writes to Lord Grey. "I am sure she is too wise a woman not to be fond of gossiping; I am fond of it and have some talent for it." And, decidedly, he did, as when he provided J. A. Murray, who worked on the *Edinburgh Review*, with this small nugget:

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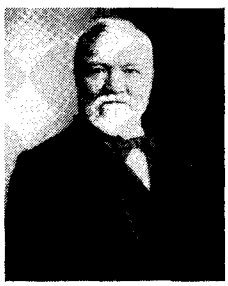

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As I know you love a bit of London scandal learn that Lady Caroline Lamb stabbed herself at Lady Ilchester's Ball for the love of Lord Byron, as it is supposed. What a charming thing to be a Poet. I preached for many years in London and was rather popular, but never heard of a Lady doing herself the smallest mischief on my account.

Gossip tends to be most plentiful in capital cities. In the United States one of our problems—it is not a very pressing one—is that we have more than one capital: Washington for politics, New York for art, no one special place for learning and intellectual life. I am insufficiently interested in politics to find the gossip of Washington—the "guilty information," in Sydney Smith's fine phrase—of much interest. Stories about Ted Kennedy, no matter how rococo the details, bore me. Which journalist is napping with which ambassador's former wife doesn't do it for me either. I consider every sentence that has the initials CIA in it at the level below that of gossip. At a large dinner party in Washington I once sat next to an Englishwoman who seemed a bit bored and who I later learned wrote a gossip column called "Ear on Washington." Had I known her occupation I would have regaled her with stories about congressmen cavorting with llamas in condominiums overlooking Rock Creek Park owned by Saudi furriers.

They order these things better in Manhattan, where the gossip tends to be less exclusively political and generally livelier. Perhaps this is owing to artists and intellectuals being intrinsically more amusing in their foibles than politicians. (My own favorite short definition of gossip, self-devised, is two people happily agreeing on the foibles of a third.) It may have something to do with New York itself, where the crowdedness and costliness of life would on first sight almost seem to preclude the fertile conditions of clandestinity necessary to carry on gossip-worthy activities. Manhattan today is not Versailles under the Sun King, which provided the perfect soil for gossip—namely, many brilliant and ambitious people living together at close quarters—but Manhattan is an island, where nothing is easily hidden and news travels fast, and, somehow, everyone seems to know everyone else's business. All this may not be one's idea of a sensible way to live, but it does make for a vast quantity of spirited talk.

Nowhere else am I treated to so rich a feast of gossip as in New York. "Heaven for climate," as Mark Twain used to say, "hell for conversation." Before the day is done all the great gossipy subjects usually get covered: money, sex, dereliction and bad character, the conjugal jungle. I learn that a not very good writer has been given a publisher's advance of $200,000 on a book that he is ill suited to write and will probably never finish; that a painter, a married woman of fifty or so, mother of four, has declared herself a lesbian and moved in with another woman; that the son of a powerful publishing executive has been found guilty of selling drugs; that a famous feminist is the "great good friend" (as *Time* magazine slyly used to put it) of a big-time real estate operator. But the spirit of gossip in New York has always been best summed up for me by an anecdote about a poet who, during a reading at the 92nd Street YMHA, read a poem in which he allowed that he was both homosexual and Jewish, to which, after the reading, W. H. Auden is supposed to have remarked to him, "Why, Jeffrey, I had no idea that you were Jewish."

Gossip is impressive in its variety. It can run from entertaining chitchat to genuine viciousness. It can claim to be factual or sheerly speculative. It can be trivializing, reprehensible, and absolutely vital to know. (Gossip differs from rumor in being exclusively about people, while rumor is frequently about such events as wars, economic trends, forthcoming business decisions.) Aquinas, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger all attacked gossip, though the latter had good reason to fear it, in both his public and private life. One recent writer on the subject, Patricia Meyer Spacks, speaks of "serious" gossip, whose "participants use talk about others to reflect upon themselves, to express wonder and uncertainty and locate certainties, to enlarge their knowledge of one another." Sissela Bok, the ethicist, who devotes a chapter of her book *Secrets* to gossip, after contemning it for the standard reasons, goes on to say that "the desire for such knowledge [as gossip brings] leads people to go beneath the surface of what is said and shown, and to try to unravel conflicting clues and seemingly false leads." I myself tend to think of gossip as an entertainment of a literary kind, in which life is understood to be a vast novel, with hundreds, even thousands of characters passing through, none of whom can be

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altogether measured by what he or she wishes to reveal about him or herself, so that gossip, when it is available, supplies additional evidence that must itself be carefully measured. At the outset it has to be understood that this novel may never yield a definitive meaning, but merely provide endless small surprises and the suggestion of revelation that never quite arrives, which, as Jorge Luis Borges once said, is perhaps the essence of the aesthetic phenomenon.

Revelation suggests secrets, yet not all gossip is about secret information. Some has to do with information not yet confirmed—has the poet really left his fourth wife? has the university president really agreed to take a job with the foundation?—but that, sooner or later, one way or another, will be known. Much gossip does have to do with secrets, or rather and more precisely with secrets broken. Someone swears you to secrecy about an item he ought not to be telling you but nonetheless feels you should know, thus paying you the high compliment of assuming you can keep a secret when he has just demonstrated that he himself cannot. Often gossip of this kind will come with specific instructions: it is strictly entre nous; or it's between you, me, and the lamppost; or this is to go no further lest my cassoulet be truly cooked.

I do believe that I am among that portion of humanity—how small a minority are we?—that can keep a secret. Self-deceived in all the standard ways, I do feel on this count I know my man. I am one of those people La Rochefoucauld must have had in mind when he indited his Maxim 120: "We betray more often through weakness than through the deliberate intention to betray." As a man with a taste for gossip, I have felt most stirringly the urge to pass along an interesting bit of "guilty information," to earn myself easy intimacy at the bargain price of putting the next fellow in possession of some inside knowledge that will delight him and cost me nothing, except a reinforced knowledge of my own weakness. Not wishing to be reminded of this weakness, I stifle the impulse, choke the urge, and stow the information in a small Ziploc bag in my mental freezer. Those who are able not to give a secret away, live to gossip another day.

None among my friends, far from being morally opposed to gossip, is above enjoying a bit of gossipy information. Some, true enough, have a keener appetite for it than do others and do go in for it in rather a big way. A common taste for gossip is not enough to build a friendship upon, but the exchange of gossip is an intimate act, or at least can be, and the extent to which one can gossip freely with a friend is one measure of the depth of intimacy in a friendship. I refer to gossip here in the full range of its activity: passing along socially classified material, speculating on other people's base and sometimes neurotic motives, being candid and usually comic about the pretensions of one's acquaintances. Gossip, you might say, and I believe I shall, is candor at other people's expense.

Obviously, one doesn't wish to be candid in this way with just anyone about everyone. In the line of gossip, I am ready to go just so far and no further with some people only on certain subjects. Apart from my wife, to whom I do not even bother to hide my most inchoate thoughts, I have one dear friend with whom I feel I can say anything about anyone. It is a very great luxury to have such a friend. In our gossiping, this friend and I do not moralize—being perfectly attuned to each other's views on morality, to do so would be superfluous—though I assure you we can be perfectly scorching on people we agree in finding disagreeable. Our real pleasure is instead in the human circus. We delight in the spectacle that human conduct provides when gossip reveals secret ambitions, pointless perversity, and sheer jolly wackiness. The true behavioral sciences, as they are studied neither in Palo Alto nor Cambridge, Mass., are what fascinate us.

As a man with a healthy appetite for gossip, I have naturally considered the possibility of having myself been the subject of gossip—putting in a cameo appearance as a small red-nosed clown with large yellow floppy shoes in the human circus just mentioned. I fear I may have led a too-quiet if far-from-blameless life. As a subject for gossip, I prove disappointing in the realm of money (I haven't enough to be interesting), sex (I am entirely monogamous, if you can believe such a striking confession as the twentieth century draws to a close), and am without secret ambition (I am, occupationally, without complaint). Only one event in my adult life might generously be construed as mildly scandalous: in my early thirties, I underwent a divorce. Since I talked about the

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details of this divorce with no one, did friends and acquaintances, I wonder, speculate upon the causes for the breakup of my marriage—Borgian cruelty? gruesome sexual incompatibility? petty-cash disputes?—as I would doubtless have done upon theirs?

As it happens, I went semi-public with this event in my life by writing a general book on the lugubrious subject of divorce, concentrating on its bitter ironies, unresolvable injustices, and ultimate sadness. In this book, I devoted several passages to my own emotional condition while undergoing the humiliations, little and large, that await anyone who goes through a divorce. I quite deliberately left my ex-wife out of the book, since I did not want it to turn into an act of personal grievance against someone I once loved and who was in no position, literarily, to defend herself against a professional writer. The problem arose, however, when the book's publisher informed me that there was wide interest in the book, and asked, in the gentle hammerlock way of a certain kind of publisher, if I would agree to a bit of publicity about it, which meant, in the nature of the case, a bit of publicity about me, which really meant that, if I were clever, here was a chance to gossip about myself for fame and, the hope was, immense profit.

Never a man to go after a main chance enthusiastically, I grudgingly agreed to go ahead with the publicity. In for a dime, as I frequently say, in for the dolour. So I went on the road, without Rosinante you may be sure, visiting seven cities in six days. This took place some fifteen years ago, and much of it is now rather blurred, but then it all seemed even more blurred when I was actually going through it. I appeared on several extremely dopey local talk shows, both on television and on radio, and underwent a number of newspaper interviews that struck me as distinguished by the high degree of insincerity shown on both sides. I was the Divorce guy, not as interesting as the Transsexual who had passed through town the previous week, but a little better than the woman who wrote the book on what's wrong with our public schools. I especially recall showing up at 6:30 A.M. on a rainy morning in Cleveland, where a goateed and potbellied disc jockey, wearing a red turtleneck and pants with a flowery print on them, announced, "Hey, WIXY weather in five minutes, but right now we got Nikolai Aristides down here to answer all your questions about divorce."

Around this time, *People* magazine sent out a woman journalist in a green Mercedes with a Hungarian photographer in tow. The Hungarian addressed me straightaway by my first name and walked off to snoop through my apartment for photo possibilities. The journalist began pumping me with a series of questions all meant to elicit the true lowdown about my private life. Two such sessions were held along with a number of telephone calls between us. A problem, clearly, had emerged. It was that, from *People*'s standpoint, I didn't appear to have much of a life, or at least none that could be told strikingly in seven or eight hundred words and three or four photographs spread across two or three pages. I had made it a condition that my two then young sons, who lived with me, were not to be photographed. A woman I was then seeing had too much natural refinement to wish to appear in the pages of *People*, so there would be no shots of us holding hands, walking dreamily down the misty beach.

There was only me, who wrote and read and watched a certain amount of television and whose life had no discernible dramatic turns or twists. The journalist took me to breakfast and pleaded for my ex-wife's address, but it was no sale. The whole story, from the journalist's point of view, wasn't working out. When the piece finally ran in *People* there was a photograph of me sitting on a bed reading a biography of Chekhov and another, shot from behind, of me standing before a bathroom sink, the whole pictorially suggesting a campaign for getting plenty of rest and remembering to wash your hands. If I hadn't realized it before, I had to know it now: to a journalist devoted to digging up rich dirt, I was hopeless, a loser, a real dog—plain bad copy. But, then, as the disc jockey at WIXY in Cleveland might say, "Hey, I can live with that."

What I live rather less easily with is the extent to which gossip has come to take over larger and larger stretches of contemporary life. The pervasiveness of gossip today—on television, in journalism, through books—is making gossip, one of life's minor pleasures, something of a major nuisance. Much investigative journalism is based chiefly on gossip,

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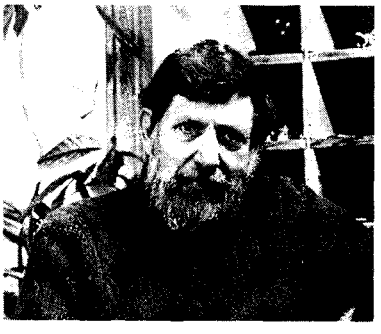

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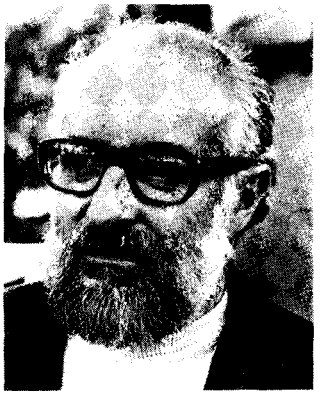

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which is to say on "leaks"—and what else is a leak but betrayal or machination by gossip—and an exposé is scarcely more than a bit of gossip gone public. Gossip-ridden books by former cabinet members and the wives of presidents are the new form of contemporary national history. Gossip remains delightful only so long as it remains private; once gossip goes public, it is inevitably degrading.

"Until quite recently," the critic John Gross has noted, "gossip was by definition what *wasn't* printed and what *wasn't* televised." Gossip columnists had long been on the scene: Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons in Hollywood, the egregious Walter Winchell in New York, with his infamous "blind" items ("Communists, your meeting, originally planned for the Roosevelt Hotel on January 9, has been cancelled"). The magazine *Confidential*, which specialized in go-for-the-groin scandal, made a great loathsome splash in the 1950s before being brought down by lawsuits. But all this was understood to be peripheral, strictly freak-show stuff, and never quite permitted under the big tent. Now, somehow, it has become center-ring.

People, *Us*, *Vanity Fair*, "Entertainment Tonight," and "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" are only a few of the magazines and television shows devoted nearly exclusively to purveying gossip. "She's outrageous, off the wall, and full of gossip," ran a recent promotional ad for the new television talk show of the comedian Joan Rivers. The phenomenon of people appearing on talk shows to gossip, in effect, about themselves is now a commonplace one. At first only fairly garish show business folk did this—starlets and specialists in the embarrassing such as the actress Shelley Winters—but soon politicians, businessmen, and serious writers began to do so. Truman Capote was masterful at milking a bit of gossip on a television talk show. I once saw John Cheever, over television, inform Dick Cavett (and a few million other people who happened to be watching) that he had for years been an alcoholic. Poor Cheever, his own children finished the job for him, when his daughter wrote a book that went into ample detail about his being homosexual and, later, his son edited a collection of his letters that confirmed his sister's scandalous stories. If my children were ever to do anything even remotely similar to me, I should greatly regret, from my grave, not having beaten them sufficiently when they were young.

"I'm a very private person" is nowadays something one usually says only to a journalist or a talk-show host. No one, once he or she reaches a certain level of fame, is permitted much in the way of privacy. The more famous one is, the less is privacy permitted. The three most-gossiped-about people in the United States today must be Jacqueline Onassis, Frank Sinatra, and Elizabeth Taylor, which probably means that they are also the three most famous people. Even in death, Marilyn Monroe and the brothers Kennedy continue to do a brisk business as the subjects of gossip. "Marilyn Pregnant by Kennedy at Death" runs the headline of a gutter-press tabloid I glimpsed this past week in the express line in my local supermarket. Cyril Connolly once said that his ambition was to write a book that could still be read ten years after its original publication; perhaps for a celebrity a comparable ambition might be to continue to be gossiped about twenty-five years after his death.

People conspiring in gossip about themselves is another new phenomenon. I was reading along rather uninterestedly in an *Esquire* article about the television news anchorman Peter Jennings, when I came across the intelligence that Jennings's wife had allegedly had a love affair with a Washington columnist. The story was apparently initially revealed in the newspaper *USA Today*, but in the *Esquire* article Jennings and his wife evidently do not mind speaking further about it. ("Their marriage, Marton [his wife] will say later, was 'kind of on automatic pilot.' ") Friends joined in to give the *Esquire* journalist further information. Jennings, we learn, "was humiliated, angry, grieving," and "nothing mattered to him more, he decided, than keeping his family together." Why are this man and his friends agreeing to talk to a journalist about such private matters? (May we leave aside the question of why I am reading about it?) Surely this doesn't come under the rubric of the public's right to know. Can it be that Jennings thinks that candor about such material will make him, a man who makes vast sums for reporting nightly disasters to the country, seem more human? With knowledge of the man's marital difficulties in mind, now, when he has finished reporting

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upon oil slicks, the breakup of the Communist empire, the rise in crime, the decline in the GNP, now is one supposed to wonder, "And at home, Peter, everything going all right at home?"

How famous does one have to be to be worth gossiping about? Doubtless the more famous the better. If it is to be gossip of the kind carried in the mass media, one must be easily identifiable. This in practice probably means that one ought to earn one's living in show business, politics, sports, television, or the arts. One might make it, too, if one is related to the immensely rich or the vastly famous or the socially well connected. (The quality of academic gossip, allow me to insert parenthetically, is usually lower than I care to go; in this realm I prefer only to hear malicious things about people about whom I already have bad opinions.) In England a royal-family connection will ring the gong every time. A story recently appeared in the *New York Times* about a relative of Queen Elizabeth, a young woman who is twenty-fourth in the line of succession to the throne, publicizing a dispute with her parents about her out-of-wedlock pregnancy. The young woman—she is twenty-three—pleaded over BBC television for her mother not to pressure her to marry. Her gentleman friend, a professional photographer, told the press that he doesn't "agree that Marina should be pushed up the aisle into, as such, a shotgun wedding."

What an old-fashioned phrase "shotgun wedding" now seems! When I was young, it cropped up with a modest frequency. Now, when one hears it at all, it has a positively antique ring. So many couples living together unmarried has put a prominent dent in it, and the passage of stricter gun control laws outlawing the ownership of shotguns ought to finish it off linguistically. But not so long ago a bride going to the altar pregnant carried, in the realm of gossip, real punch. Let me see if I can recollect other items that did. Many among them in the middle-class neighborhoods in which I grew up had to do with failure, usually in business, sometimes with children who didn't turn out as planned or otherwise went astray to graze in those pastures set aside for black sheep. I knew about a man who went to prison for a year for draft evasion during World War II: he was supposed to be working at a job in a defense plant and sent someone else to work at it in his place; when he was caught it was considered a sad disgrace for his family, who stood by him. As an adolescent, I never heard true-life stories of philandering or cuckolding, though there were of course endless jokes about both. As for homosexuality, it, to my youthful knowledge, had not yet been invented.

Tame stuff all this might now seem, but it left plenty of room on the margins for scandal, and hence for gossip, to thrive. Contemporary standards of behavior, by contrast, have all but annihilated scandal. It isn't that the world has run out of scandalous behavior, merely of behavior it chooses to consider scandalous. As a notable example, I notice a practice allowed extremely successful male artists of fathering illegitimate children: Woody Allen and Mikhail Baryshnikov have both taken this to be among great success's generous perks. Where a single divorce used to seem mildly scandalous, now three or four marriages seem unremarkable and thus scarcely worthy of gossipy remark. *The New Yorker*, once a bastion of cultural prudery, whose regular contributors had to find other magazines to publish their sexier material, is now open in its support, at least in criticism, of pornography in visual art; and not long ago one of its critics calmly proclaimed her lesbianism in its pages. Eustace Tilley, not to speak of William Shawn, would have fainted dead away.

The consequence of the annihilation of former categories of scandal has been not to eliminate gossip but instead to raise its stakes. Where once upon a time there might have been gossip about whether or not an actor or writer was homosexual—and I recall vividly a time in the early 1960s in New York when such gossip was used as a strong smear tactic, the social equivalent of McCarthyism—now the gossip is more likely to turn on whether or not such men have AIDS. One saw this in the general flow of gutter-press gossip about Rock Hudson before his death; it operated even more vigorously in the case of Roy Cohn. In the less glaring intellectual world that I inhabit, it had for years been said of a young writer, a gifted man from a distinguished artistic family, that he was dying of AIDS. When he died earlier this year, at forty, no mention was made of that dread virus in connection with his death, at least in any press or personal accounts I read, and so

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people are left to speculate upon it. The moral here is that, though scandal would appear to be eliminated, gossip doesn't die. It only finds new subjects.

Gossip contains a built-in intensifying element. It has to provide not merely ever-fresh but ever-more-amazing information. One of the more hideous gutter sheets on display in my supermarket illustrates the way this works. Along with running rather standard stories about Elvis, John Lennon, and Hitler still being alive, about UFOs, miracle drug cures for cancer, and monstrous animals, it occasionally carries headlines about fantastic pregnancies, such as "Girl Six Pregnant" or "Great Grandmother Eighty-two Pregnant." The other day, waiting to have my groceries checked through, I noticed the headline "Two-Headed Woman Pregnant." (I assume that the paper even now has an ace reporter out searching for the extraordinary man who caused this pregnancy.) Given the new openness of behavior, and the degree to which the once-scandalous appears in many quarters to have become normalized, regular human gossip sometimes seems to be approaching the stage of "Three-Headed Woman Pregnant with Antelope."

Not that I in the least worry about them, but it occurs to me that it probably isn't easy to be a gossip columnist in this new scandal-free atmosphere. The day is long past when Hedda Hopper could hold Hollywood in thrall, or Walter Winchell could terrorize anyone in politics, sports, or show business by threatening to run a mischievous item about him. Today one must have to reach, stretch, invent to find items that truly titillate. I do not now read a regular gossip column, but if I did, so mad has the world of professional gossip become, I think I should just as soon read one that was purely imaginative. It would contain items like "Trump Buys Bessarabia," "Barbara Walters Contemplates Sex Change," "Oprah Dates Donahue Son," "Cher Undergoes Face Transplant." Let 'er, I say, rip.

Yet most people with an interest in gossip, myself among them, continue to survive on the scraps from the ancien régime of middle-class behavior. A man in his seventies marries a woman forty years younger than he, and the telephone rings, sly smiles are passed along with the bread across the lunch table, and the heads of women shake knowingly. A local basketball coach is fired without explanation after a winning season, and the telephone rings, and a friend reports that he heard from another, well-placed friend that behind the firing is what is euphemistically known as a "conflict of lifestyle," which dysphemistically means that the coach had been sleeping with the daughter of one of the team's owners. My interest—disinterest really—in such matters does not seem to slacken.

"The attitude of psychology," W. H. Auden once remarked, "should always be, 'Have you heard this one?' " That happens also to be the attitude of gossip, whose true interest, if I may put the best possible face on it, is in human psychology. A bit of gossip is a datum, a report on ostensibly hidden doings, evidence that the old Adam has been let loose or some fresh Adam has invented a new twist in what one would have thought was a game in which all the possible twists had already been wrung. A man is discovered slipping around town with his ex-wife, an enormously successful playwright demonstrates pathetic vanity about his rather wretched poetry, a woman worth millions never neglects to remove the extra soap and to steal at least one ashtray whenever she stays at a hotel. I love to hear about all such human zaniness. Not only is it rich material in and of itself, but it shows that finally the last word can never be said about our peculiar species. So splendidly peculiar are we that I have this unavoidable suspicion that, despite my carefully attending to all the observations available in books and through art, despite my full-time attempt to be a man upon whom nothing is lost, I still ain't heard nothing yet.

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The New American Assembly-Line Fiction

An Empty Blue Center

JOHN W. ALDRIDGE

IN TWO SPECIAL ISSUES appearing twenty-four years apart, in 1963 and 1987, *Esquire Magazine* published feature articles purporting to indicate just where the major centers of literary power are located in the United States and which writers have the greatest influence on the course of national literary affairs. When studied side by side, the two sets of findings provide the basis for some illuminating insights into the nature of the American literary life as it has evolved or, depending on one's point of view, devolved over the last quarter century. Much of the information given in the two issues is presented through the medium of double-page maps on which persons and places considered by *Esquire* to be literarily important are located. On the 1963 map these are designated in a fairly prosaic fashion, with specific areas of artistic interest marked out in different colors according to their roughly terrestrial placement under such headings as "Squaresville," "Ivory Tower," "College Campuses," and "The Cool World."

But the format chosen for the 1987 presentation clearly embodies an attempt at something far more grandiose. Any resemblance to the earth is erased from the map, and what is depicted is spectacularly cosmological. The persons and places possessing the greatest concentration of literary power are represented now as Stars, Nova, Ursae Majoris, and Media Showers, and by the various signs of the zodiac. In short, by 1987 the map has become a perfect mirror for the present age of show-business celebrity and glitz. In slightly more than twenty years it seems we have arrived at such a hyped-up condition of euphoria that we no longer see ourselves as dealing with mere places and people but as inhabiting a literary cosmos sparkling with the first-magnitude incandescence of Heavenly Bodies.

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The implications of this change may be easily inferred from the differing contents of the two maps. Dominating both is a flaming red area—in 1963, a large and untidy smear of color extending over a good quarter of the map, and in 1987, a small, neat circle about the size of a doughnut—representing that privileged locale known as "The Red-Hot Center." Placed here are the names of personages deemed by *Esquire* to possess the highest status in the literary community. Interestingly enough, in the "Center" of 1963 appear literally dozens of names of serious writers and critics, some of whom are grouped together according to publishers or the various agents representing them. The long list of "Working Critics," about a third of whom occupy the "Center," is itself extremely impressive and includes, among many others, such figures as Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley, Alfred Kazin, and Dwight Macdonald. Also falling within the "Center" in 1963 are the names of writers listed under the titles of two prominent literary magazines—*Partisan Review* and *Paris Review*—to which at the time they were contributors. Writers for *Commentary, The Hudson Review, Story,* and *Contact* are listed but in a yellow area outside the "Center," along with a number of others associated with the more prestige-laden creative writing programs at Iowa, Stanford, Columbia, and elsewhere. The major publishers and agents are included with their better-known clientele, and in addition to the list of "Working Critics," there are even separate categories in the area designated as "Ivory Tower" for "Academic Critics" (Lionel Trilling, Hugh Kenner, et al.) and "Theoreticians" (René Wellek, Northrop Frye, et al.).

The 1987 map is an altogether different affair. To be sure, there are comparable and extensive listings of writers under the rubric of their publishers and agents. In fact, this kind of material occupies a far larger area this time than it did in 1963, the implication being that the business affiliations writers have with publishers and agents have assumed much greater importance than they were seen to have twenty-four years before, while other formerly important adjuncts of the creative process—literary magazines and critics—have become quite irrelevant. And this impression is confirmed by the complete disappearance from the 1987 map of all listings of academic and theoretical critics and magazines, even though both continue to exist and may even be said to have increased in number over the last twenty-five years. Also missing are the names of poets and the kinds of writers who were designated in 1963 as belonging to the avant-garde and who were included under the heading of "The Cool World." Their absence in 1987 presumably implies that poetry and experimental writing no longer exist or, at any rate, no longer count, because, after all, they don't sell.

Interestingly enough, the only critics named on the 1987 map are daily or weekly reviewers for such large-circulation publications as the

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New York Times, Publisher's Weekly, Time, Newsweek, and the *Washington Post.* This would seem, on the face of it, rather baffling because it represents a complete reversal of opinion. In 1963, such reviewers were contemptuously banished to a Siberian exile colony designated on the map as "Squaresville." But now they have been restored not only to major prominence but, given the absence from the map of the other kinds of critics, to sole critical authority, quite as if their responses to books are the only responses that matter these days.

But perhaps most astonishing of all is the placement of a daily *New York Times* reviewer, Michiko Kakutani, within the 1987 "Red-Hot Center" as the only critical commentator who, according to *Esquire,* is taken at all seriously by serious people. The remarkable feature of this elevation to high office is that in her relatively short tenure at the daily *Times* Miss Kakutani has shown herself to be an assiduous consumer of new books, mostly of fiction, without displaying more than a minimal ability to distinguish one from the other. The fact that the book under review was written by a new or a recently-become-trendy author is usually enough to earn it Miss Kakutani's praise. Since she is almost uniformly consistent in this reaction, she has become a powerful publicist who could scarcely do a better job if she were in the employ of the American Booksellers Association. Therefore, given the current ascendancy of hype over critical discussion, it is undoubtedly only fitting that her name should appear in the "Red-Hot Center."

But the presence there of some of the other names is more problematical. Of the hundred or so appearing in the space in 1963, just two—Norman Mailer and Saul Bellow—reappear in 1987, and they are joined by only nine others. In addition to Kakutani, the newly elected are Raymond Carver (who recently died), Gary Fisketjon, who, in *Esquire*'s words, is "the only young editor . . . who has the power—and the inclination—to publish his contemporaries"; Robert Gottlieb, the Knopf editor recently appointed to the editorship of *The New Yorker*; Elmore Leonard, a best-selling writer of blockbuster thrillers; Gordon Lish, "an author, editor, teacher, and publisher" and prolific encourager of young literary talent; Gayfried Steinberg, a rich and beautiful giver of parties and chief patroness of PEN; John Updike; and, finally, Amanda ("Binky") Urban, a literary agent whom *Esquire* considers the hottest around.

What is significant about this list is that it includes not one important critic, just three writers of established reputation, one writer (Carver) of some talent but minor stature, a commercial hack, and five people, their names comprising nearly half the list, who are publishers, editors, agents, or, in the case of Steinberg, philanthropic supporters of the arts. As *Esquire* itself admits, "Today, in place of the hipster, we have the

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hypester," and it is obvious that indeed we do. But, to put the matter more bluntly, one might say that in place of serious, independent writers—only the most celebrated of whom are represented on the list—we have merchants operating a vast corporate enterprise engaged in the mass manufacture and promotion of books, merchants, furthermore, who wish to be as free as possible from, and would like to deny the existence of, the judgments, or the quality controls that serious criticism might impose on their products.

That is perhaps one important reason why the centers of critical activity and influence that were depicted on the 1963 map as scattered abundantly across the country, mostly at universities, are almost entirely omitted from the map of 1987. In their place the regions where writers live and party together (the Hamptons, Connecticut, Martha's Vineyard) are given prominent position, as are the names of the people who are best known for giving the parties (George Plimpton, Jean Stein, and again Gayfried Steinberg). Obviously, the only center that counts now is located in New York and its immediate environs. Everything that can be considered remotely important in literary style and endeavor is produced or is huckstered, sold, and consumed there. And the additions to and deletions from the 1987 map make it very clear exactly what has happened to create this monolithic and self-protective concentration of power. Although the symbiotic relationship between serious criticism and the production of literature, while regrettably thin in the best of times, has clearly deteriorated badly over the last twenty-five years, the 1987 map, by showing it to have disappeared altogether, generates the most useful illusion—at least for the publishing business—that the only criticism worthy of notice is the work of daily and weekly reviewers.

These are the people whose function it is to report regularly on newly published books, but who, because of limitations of time and space, are nearly always forced to treat them superficially and, for the most part, favorably—that is, with emphasis on those qualities that will be attractive to an avid group of book buyers. The book buyers evidently choose to buy books because they are recommended by reviewers, but they tend to read them the way they consume made-for-television films and would be hard-pressed the next day to remember what they had read or watched the night before.

Such a situation makes it possible for literary products to be touted and sold on the market without having to pass more than minimal critical inspection and in some instances to become briefly appealing for altogether meretricious reasons. The novels of Jay McInerney and Bret Easton Ellis, for example, are by any serious critical measure artistically empty works that are best-sellers largely because they depict a spiritually empty world that is attractive to readers who are themselves

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spiritually empty and who in reading them experience a faint twinge of self-recognition. But considering the popularity of these works, there is no reason for publishers or reviewers to give public notice to such a subversive consideration. And if the critical community does not give it public notice or is not heeded when it does, then there exists no means by which the reading audience can be influenced in the making of critical judgments.

All this would seem to put these writers and some of their contemporaries in an extremely bizarre position, for they have come to public attention and been installed in a kind of modest eminence without first having had to earn that eminence through the accretion around them of responsible critical opinion deeming them worthy of it. On the strength of some favorable or not unfavorable reviews and through being named in survey articles as forming with one another an important new literary group, they have become familiar names known mostly for being familiar names.

At the very least they are likely to be left floundering in a situation, similar to the one I half-facetiously described in *Time to Murder and Create* (1966) right after the first *Esquire* survey appeared in 1963, as overtaking hypothetical young writers whose names had been favored for inclusion in the "Red-Hot Center."

> It is not so very surprising that there should be young one- or two-book writers today who seem to feel no particular obligation to settle down to their proper business of writing more books, since they already enjoy most of the advantages of having written them without having had to. It is not surprising *if* one remembers . . . that what we are dealing with here is actually not a literary world at all, but a publicity and celebrity world, in which the writer simply as personality or public phenomenon can achieve, if he is lucky, a status comparable in kind, if not in scope, to that of movie stars and political figures, but in which his status may have little or nothing to do with his contribution to literature.
>
> The fact that it is not genuine literary status he enjoys may or may not trouble his conscience. It very probably will not, for the counterfeit that he does enjoy is what passes for the real thing in the world in which he so successfully makes his way, and it would be absurd to expect him to take quixotic risks for the sake of a principle that would be certain not to pay off. The respect of his peers and contemporaries, the support of an informed and genuinely interested readership, the benefits to be derived from a criticism that senses and attempts to define the real values in his work—all these may be nice idealisms to which now and then his mind dreamily recurs. But he is far too ambitious and practical to be willing to wait for the revolution that might one day turn them into realities. Besides, if they ever became realities, who knows what might happen to his career?

The principal difference between the situation in 1963 and the situation today is that the problems created for young writers by publicity overkill have if anything worsened. Where in 1963 I could charge that serious criticism was at fault for treating the work of such

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writers as literary phenomena, as *objects* of analysis and textual commentary, quite apart from any really close engagement of their quality as artists, it is now possible for *Esquire* in its vaudevillian conception of the literary marketplace to leave criticism out of account altogether and to give over the entire evaluative function to book reviewers.

Yet to be fair one has to admit that this has not occurred just because the moguls of the marketplace have chosen for self-protective reasons to deny the existence of criticism. Nor in this cynical age can they be blamed for seizing the quite uncontested opportunity to generate a climate in which publicity rather than solid achievement produces reputation. Publishers, after all, may dream of becoming benevolent middlemen for the creation of deathless masterworks, but they are in the highly mortal business of manufacturing commodities that sell.

The fact is that the major responsibility for the failure of serious criticism to exert a corrective influence in the marketplace—and its consequent disappearance from the 1987 *Esquire* map—must be borne by criticism itself as well as by the periodicals that once provided it with an outlet and an audience extending beyond the walls of academia. Until fairly recently it was possible for the people *Esquire* listed as "Working Critics" to publish essay reviews—often as long as three to four thousand words—that discussed at some depth current books of consequence or inconsequence and that were addressed to a general well-educated readership. Periodicals such as the *New York Herald Tribune Book Week, New Republic, Nation, Saturday Review*, even now and then the *New York Times Book Review* once gave considerable space to such commentaries and often allowed critics to appear on a fairly regular basis so that they had access to a continuing medium for the development of their ideas. Before the book section was abolished altogether in the early 1980s, it was even possible to find long and closely evaluative critical essays in *Harper's*, and throughout the 1970s I for one was given the opportunity to publish essay-length reviews several times a year in the literary pages of *The Saturday Review*.

But these outlets have dramatically declined in number. The *New York Herald Tribune Book Week* suspended publication many years ago. *Saturday Review* had ceased by 1980 to print reviews longer than snippets of a hundred words or so, and *New Republic* and *Nation* are providing less and less space for discussion of imaginative literature.

Over the past two decades, furthermore, there has been a massive acceleration in the pace of the movement that first became visible in the 1950s and that has brought increasing numbers of literary people to the universities, many of whom might in a more hospitable time have become independent working critics. In the university today, at least among younger faculty, the teaching of and writing about contemporary

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literature flourishes to the point where it has achieved the proportions of a major industry. Yet very little, if any of it, affects the production or reception of this literature in the marketplace. For one thing, it is mostly theoretical and analytical rather than evaluative in approach (and thus unbearably jargon-laden), and for another, it is nearly always published in journals that are virtually unknown to the general reading public.

Perhaps the factor most responsible for preventing academic criticism from having a vital influence on the public reception of new work is its concern almost exclusively with work that is not only no longer new but is the product of contemporary writers whose reputations are solidly established and whose suitability as objects of study cannot, therefore, be seriously questioned. Where in an earlier time working critics, writing for *Saturday Review* or *New Republic*, might discover and take the risk of promoting new literary talents, the academic critics concern themselves primarily with investigating the ambiguities to be found in, or testing various deconstructionist theories on, the work of such already academically canonized talents as Bellow, Mailer, Heller, Vonnegut, and Updike. They most emphatically do not do this in the course of reassessing those talents or to raise subversive doubts as to whether they deserve the high prestige that they currently enjoy. Academic critics tend by nature and calling to be reluctant to give their attention to any work that is not already thoroughly ground in the mill of the orthodox.

There are, to be sure, certain other writers such as Pynchon, Barth, DeLillo, Coover, Gaddis, and the brothers Barthelme who form what at one time would have been called an avant-garde of American fiction writers, whose work is difficult enough to invite scholarly explication, and who, partly because of that difficulty, have not achieved really large reputations among the general reading public. Yet even in relation to this technically radical, albeit not exactly new group, there is very little disagreement among academic critics over the question of their relative merits. In fact, that question is very seldom raised, almost as if through some silent critical consensus it had been declared irrelevant. For somehow these writers have already been selected to become prime candidates for assimilation into the official establishment of contemporary writers, their principal thematic and formal characteristics having by now been extensively documented, graphed, cross-referenced, disinfected of mystery, and made safe for classroom consumption. And if the general public in its ignorance has not yet come to recognize just how important these writers are, then that, in the academic view, is simply further proof that they are important.

Yet it must be said that academic criticism at its best is at times the most sensitive and informed criticism now being written about contemporary literature, and its failure or its refusal to communicate with the

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literary marketplace and the general reader cannot help but have a damaging effect upon newer writers, such as those so vigorously touted by *Esquire*. It has left them, as I have said, quite obviously in a kind of standardless void and at the mercy of the book reviewers and the various agencies dedicated to the promotion of their books. Their situation, in fact, is an exceedingly strange one, and their presence on the literary scene has about it a peculiar ghostly quality.

Where in 1950, for example, there may have been ten or fifteen new young writers of some evident promise competing for critical and public attention, there now appear to be hundreds, mass-produced as if by machine. And it is often extremely difficult to distinguish one from the other, not only because so few of them engage the attention in an interesting and provocative way, but because so many of them seem to be interchangeable in their manner of writing, as if the machine that produced them specialized in turning out carbon copies. Their first books may be reviewed politely, even respectfully, because they are nothing if not well-schooled journeymen in the craft of composition. But following the appearance of those books they seem to drop into a swamp of oblivion without leaving a ripple on the surface and are not heard of again until their next books appear. Nothing in the interval seems to accrue around their names or their work, no curiosity about their personalities, no animated discussion of their writing, no critical debates over their artistic merits or demerits.

One must, however, concede the point that most of these writers today seem to be more notable at least at the moment for what they are not than for what they are, and it may be that the current situation is at least partly a consequence of that fact. In sharp contrast to the young Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Salinger, Bellow, and Cheever, they have not attracted attention because of the distinctiveness of their writing styles or subjects or the originality of their use of the standard fictional forms. Their books have not so far created new circuits in the public imagination or provided the charged symbols for a new vision of the human condition in our time, nor has their language enlarged the vocabulary with which we describe the most urgent problems and preoccupations that concern us.

There appear to be among them no exotic personages on the order of the precocious, androgynous-looking young Capote, Vidal, and McCullers, no equivalents of the young Mailer and Jones who together produced the first important novels to come out of World War II, no replacements for the Heller and Vonnegut who provided a fresh if not always esteemed comic vision of the institutionalized absurdities of American life. These writers and a certain few of their contemporaries generated some real excitement, at least during the years when they

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were producing their early—and in the case of some of them, their finest—work. But their descendants today—even those such as Raymond Carver and Ann Beattie, who are perhaps best-known—appear destined to join the host of people who will have a glorious but ever-so-brief acquaintance with fame. All of them seem poised perpetually at the starting gate of genuine literary reputation, waiting to run a race that somehow cannot be concluded in favor of any winner because no one can define the rules or the track on which the race will be run.

II

The newer writers now beginning to become known for their first work or, in a few fortunate cases, who are already famous enough to be represented on the *Esquire* map, belong to the first literary generation in American history (or, for that matter, in any history) ever to be created almost exclusively through formal academic instruction in creative writing. Unlike some of the most prominent members of the older generation—Styron, Mailer, Heller, and Vonnegut, among others—who have neither been taught to write nor become full-time teachers of writing, a surprising number of their descendants are the products of the advanced-degree writing programs that began proliferating around the country in the 1960s. These programs have had more to do than any other force with shaping the character of the writers they instruct as well as the literature those writers produce. In fact, the differences between the neophyte writers who are graduates of these programs and their predecessors in all previous generations are dramatic and extremely instructive because they illustrate the remarkable changes that have occurred in the ontogeny of literary apprenticeship in recent times.

The most significant of these changes is also the most obvious. The process by which a young person traditionally awoke to the discovery that he had somehow become a writer was until now quite often a mysterious, painful, and lonely one. There had perhaps occurred at some unknown time in the turbulence of his psychic life an accidental conjunction of experience and temperament that brought the discovery about, most often in a state of relative social isolation and most assuredly not as a result of benevolent collective or institutional effort. American writers, in particular, perhaps because they are not naturally bred and nurtured here, have, at least in modern times, usually been, like Auden's Yeats, hurt, irritated, or provoked into becoming writers. Their sense of estrangement derives from a culture that has been provincially inhospitable, if not somewhat hostile, to the kind of person they found themselves to be or a culture that subscribed to a system of values that they saw either as irrelevant to their deepest concerns or as utterly monstrous.

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Very often in childhood they were driven to literature as an unconsciously sought alternative to more damaging emotional disturbance. Literature became for some of them a means of escaping from their feelings of social isolation and at the same time of finding in the fictive world of books a confirmation of values more civilized and humane than those in force in the world around them. Eventually they learned to write from reading literature, not from taking courses. By slow degrees, these writers formed their literary standards on the work of the best writers and in defiance of the standards of those they ultimately recognized to be the worst.

In view of all this, it is not surprising that over the last hundred or so years American writers have in the main been highly individualistic in their manner of writing and adversarial in their attitudes toward the established culture. As a rule, they have been self-taught and self-motivated, working alone or in only brief proximity to one another, and finding little imaginative sustenance in American life except material for books that so often and so poignantly revealed just how little sustenance they had found in American life. Perhaps this is a way of saying that they have been blessed or cursed with that sense of otherness that Henry James spoke of as the primary psychic orientation of the natural writer, or at least the natural American writer. Their cultural estrangement, regardless of the many ingratiating guises and disguises it may have assumed, has, in the case of some of them, been such that it has endowed their best work with a kind of subversive clarity of vision in which experience is rendered often through a concentration on realistic detail so obsessive that it seems at times to border on the paranoid.

This development is one of the major reasons why iconoclastic realism became established as the dominant mode of American fiction, and it remained dominant for most of this century, leading to the production of some of the most vital and acerbic novels ever to appear in our literary history. In their profound disaffection with American life many of our writers have given us our most brilliantly realistic portraits of that life. Yet there has also been in our fiction a contrary strain that in recent decades has grown much more visible, the tendency of certain of our writers to express their disaffection in ways that push beyond the limits imposed by conventional realism into areas in which realistic details may become transformed into metaphors that embody more fully and precisely than realism the particular character of the writers' disaffection.

An early example of this is John Dos Passos's *USA*, a fictional trilogy usually considered, at least in its central narrative, to be a work of classic realism. Yet it soon becomes obvious that *USA* is not a portrait of any realistically observed America but of a country hallucinated by a malev-

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olent economic conspiracy that has reduced the inhabitants to the condition of slavish automatons in whom all human qualities have been compromised or corrupted. Realism has, in this case, capitulated to political ideology. But behind ideology lies the paranoia of John Dos Passos directing him in the metaphorical portrayal of a culture that is the destroyer of values that he believes to be transcendental.

Still earlier and very different examples of this same tendency can be found as far back as the novels of Hawthorne and Melville, which are not, at least in our modern sense of the term, realistic works, nor are they works of cultural or political disaffection. Yet some of them give the impression that they are taking place in a sanctified vacuum virtually uncontaminated by the presence of people because the imaginative eye of their authors is so firmly fixed on the cosmos and the heavenly warfare of good with evil. In their case, the disaffection might appear to be with the whole secular world that is there in the novels, one might say, on sufferance and to stand as metaphor of the debasement of the sacred.

Interestingly enough, there are indications that this form of cosmic or mystical vision has resurfaced in a good many of our novelists at the present time. One finds evidence of it in the highly convoluted "systems" novels of Don DeLillo and William Gaddis in which the primary interest lies not in a realistic depiction of the social scene but in the intricate choreography of fictional motifs, the interplay of thematic forces within the narrative ecology, which become in effect an aesthetic replacement for, and a considerable improvement upon, the social scene.

These and similar novels are burdened by a heavy weight of abstract speculation—often generated by a realism of detail that one sometimes feels is present simply to serve as its launching platform—about the meaning of sin, guilt, redemption, bureaucratic totalitarianism, political corruption, the tyranny and treachery of sex, the psychopathology of violence and murder. All of these concerns are, perhaps, in some degree compensations for the failure of the writers to find sufficiently significant experience in the quotidian life of the culture, and so they need to seek out and confront the extremes of moral and aesthetic possibility in some transcendental sphere above and beyond the quotidian.

Alexis de Tocqueville observed with great prescience that in a democracy such as ours "each citizen is habitually engaged in the contemplation of a very puny object: namely, himself. If he ever looks higher, he perceives the immense form of society at large or the still more imposing aspect of mankind. . . . What lies between is a void." As so many of our contemporary novels amply demonstrate, American writers have continued to devote much of their energies to the contemplation of their puny selves. But when they are not so occupied and they

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have looked higher, they have tended to fill the void between with portraits of society at large and mankind in general, portraits that often swell to the dimensions of allegory, myth, and the more technical abstractions of metafiction and fabulation.

By contrast, the British, whose literature has traditionally been the kind Tocqueville described as typical of aristocratic societies, have gone on producing work that is generally far less ambitious in scope than ours, more firmly rooted in the social actualities, and much more agreeable and affectionate in its rendition of those actualities. It is, for the most part, a literature that is stoutly secular and pragmatic in its interests and that seems to possess little tolerance for abstract moral speculation. Perhaps because British writers appear not to suffer from our particular American form of cultural estrangement, they can observe their society with a greater equanimity and dispassion and with a livelier (because untraumatized) fascination with its foibles and idiosyncrasies. Even when they are satirical, as they so often are, their attitude seems to be one of genial delight over the observed pretensions rather than the usual American attitude of horror and disgust.

It would seem that at least in this regard the younger generation of university-trained American writers resembles the British more closely than they do their literary predecessors in this country, for they too seem not to be estranged from their culture, if only for the reason that they belong to a culture of their own, a professional aristocracy or guild made up of young writers like themselves and their instructors. This culture has very little, if any, connection with American society in general. It is extremely doubtful, in fact, whether more than a few people outside the universities are aware of its existence. Yet it provides these writers with some of the same supports traditionally provided writers by a loyal readership or, as happened for a time in the 1920s, by an expatriate community of sympathetic peers. It actually functions as a substitute for both in the case of those of its members whose work fails to attract the attention of that commercial literary world represented by the celebrity maps of *Esquire*.

The process by which a young writer is selected for membership in this culture is relatively simple, but the rewards of selection can be very considerable. If his qualifying manuscripts—consisting usually of a few short stories or poems—are judged by his mentors to be sufficiently promising to earn him admission to a graduate writing program, his status and security as a writer will be assured for an indefinite time to come. He will be placed in close association with other apprentices in workshop sessions in which his and their work will be closely examined and collectively discussed. If he wins acceptance in the classroom and among his peers and instructors, he will become part of a complex

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network of in-group patronage through which he will be given access to important opportunities for a writing career.

His first novel, collection of short stories, or book of poems—any one of which is the customary written requirement for completion of the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree—may be recommended by his instructors for publication by a small press perhaps staffed in part by former MFA students, or his manuscript may be entered in one or more of the many literary prize contests that are open to young writers and often are judged by a panel of older writers, some of whom may be friends of his instructors. He will in addition be eligible to join the traveling circuit of young writers who, with their instructors, move from one writers' conference to another during the summers, meeting with and listening to other young writers give public readings from their work. It may happen also that one of his instructors will at some point call an old conference or reading-circuit friend who is teaching writing at another university and arrange for the young writer to give a reading at the friend's university in exchange for the friend or one of his students giving a reading at his university.

Before very long, if he has contrived to give readings at the right places and has won favor with the right people, it is quite possible for the young writer to become well known, even slightly famous, on the traveling circuit. He will have acquired an audience of his fellow students, his instructors, and their friends without having published much of anything and while remaining entirely unknown to the general reading public. What has happened is that he has become a respectable member of a professional fraternity made up of those who are students and teachers of writing and whose principal means of support consists of one another. Their function is to serve and preserve at all costs the study and teaching of writing, which like any corporate enterprise must be kept going because the survival of its employees depends upon it. Only in a very few exceptional cases are they impelled or sufficiently gifted to resign from the fraternity and make individual reputations in the larger literary world through the creation of a significant body of work. In fact, status within the fraternity serves as a convenient substitute for that kind of achievement and offers its own rewards to the many who would not be capable of it. Among the most tangible of those rewards for the young writer is of course the opportunity to go forth from the university, equipped with an MFA, and be hired by another university to teach even younger young writers how to write.

The writers who belong to this highly politicized fraternity of writing instruction are the academic equivalents of those whose names have become familiar as a result of favorable reviews and publishers' promotion, who may have achieved mention on an *Esquire* map, and yet do not

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have secure reputations in the literary world. The two groups are comparable in that each has won some status without attaining real position and for reasons of in-group support rather than strong individual accomplishment. Yet the writers heavily promoted by publishers have, for the most part, made some small mark outside the walls of the university and are at least competing with one another to gain recognition and readership for their work.

The academic writers of course share this same ambition, but their ambition can so often be too easily tranquilized by the surrogate gratifications offered by their membership in the fraternity. This can cause them to put off indefinitely the struggle that for any writer is finally the only important struggle—to come to grips with his talent within the stresses and at times unendurable frustrations of the literary marketplace.

The point, obviously, is that the academic writer is allowed to remain aloof from that struggle for so long as he continues to function within the benevolent precincts of the fraternity and finds an attentive if small audience for public readings from his work within the fraternity. He need not take the larger risks that writers have traditionally always taken to achieve a hearing for their work because he already has a hearing any time he wants it without taking any risks at all.

In fact, his academic training as a writer will undoubtedly have taught him early on that the taking of risks is decidedly not the gateway to literary success in the fraternity world. In his workshop sessions with his fellow students he will have learned that critical opinion on a particular manuscript is arrived at by consensus, and that critical approval is determined by the number of favorable opinions offered by the class. A piece of writing that is marked by originality of style or point of view or that does not conform to what is considered fashionable as measured by its resemblance to the work of certain admired mentors, such as Raymond Carver or Ann Beattie, will undoubtedly be disturbing to many members of the class, and so will not be deemed acceptable. Thus, as a result of the democratized process by which critical decisions are reached in the workshop, distinctions are washed out or considered taboo, while a uniformity or homogenization of effects is made to seem a cardinal virtue. One hears more perceptive students complain that after a collective workshop critique, a story or poem will all too often have been denuded of individual character and made to seem anonymous or the product of just anybody or nobody. It would follow from this that after such an indoctrination a young writer would hardly be disposed to take any risks, since his success is seemingly measured in the degree of his refusal to take them.

Interestingly enough, this may help to explain the rather astounding absence of critical discussion and debate at the typical public readings

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that are a regular feature of the program at writers' conferences and the graduate schools of creative writing. So much of the material read on such occasions is so bland, so competently but unexcitingly written, so interchangeable in style and substance that it very seldom stimulates a distinct response from the audience or provides any firm basis for discussion or dispute. Yet, strangely and with an effect that is sometimes eerie, the atmosphere at these readings tends to be downright reverential, as if an awesome spiritual epiphany were taking place, as if the reader on the platform were performing some sacred priestly ritual. Of course, that is exactly what he is doing. Through his appearance he is sanctifying the holy function of the writer, and while he is on the platform he is serving as a symbol of the writer in the abstract receiving the adoring attention of the public. He therefore becomes a symbol in turn of all the aspiring writers in the audience and of their own consuming ambition to be the recipients of the same attention. In worshipping him, in other words, they are in effect worshipping themselves and paying homage to the sacramental importance that they attribute to the role of the writer, in preparation for which, after all, they have expended such a large portion of their youth and energy.

This may be a reason why the work being read never seems to be judged on its quality, why there tends to be no discussion of it, and why, in fact, the audience, having heard it read, seems immediately to forget all about it much in the same way they appear to forget the work of more successful writers whom they profess to admire but also seem never to discuss. For what finally counts in the fraternity system of values is not the quality of the work produced but the continued existence and promotion of writers. Any question raised about quality would surely be considered a form of treason or self-sabotage, since it would threaten to expose one's own grave limitations and might ultimately undermine the system altogether. Hence, it would appear that the members of the fraternity have made an unspoken agreement not to discuss the quality of the work being read by the writer on the platform. That is their insurance against the day when they themselves will be up there reading and will expect to receive unqualified approval from the audience, not critical judgment.

What is at issue here is a professional fraternity so obsessed with turning out writers that it has lost all regard for the purpose they are supposed to serve and the skill with which they may be expected to serve it. It is rather as if the medical profession were to produce physicians whose ability to treat patients is considered irrelevant when weighed against the fact that the medical profession must be kept going and that the training of physicians is a vital source of revenue and prestige.

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But much of the fault is obviously inherent in the premise on which creative writing programs function. One might argue that while universities may be adequate institutions for the study of literature, they are clearly not constituted to train its potential creators, especially given the nature of the training provided. Unlike graduate programs in the visual arts or in music composition, writing programs do not, as a rule, require their students to learn specific techniques, nor do they measure their progress through their increasing ability to make use of those techniques in their own work. There is, in short, no formal curricular plan for monitoring the development of writing students as they evolve from apprenticeship through ever more demanding performance requirements until they arrive at a condition at least approaching competence. Writing students are accepted for training on the basis of such signs of creative promise as may be visible in their qualifying manuscripts, and from then on their work is judged on its own terms—that is, on qualities already present in it at the time they entered training. These qualities may be refined after years of practice in the craft of writing, but in most programs they are not enriched by instruction in traditional literary techniques or a close study of the work of acknowledged masters in the field—on the theory, perhaps, that such study might sully the confidence of the students.

As a result, it is entirely possible for a young writer to be graduated from one of these programs in almost total ignorance of the tradition of his craft and, for that matter, with only superficial knowledge of literature. He will have retained throughout his training the immature approach to writing with which he began. He may have acquired a certain technical proficiency, but he is unlikely to have developed an individual style or a distinctive point of view, since so much of his time has been spent working in an intellectual vacuum, alone with his manuscripts and unnurtured by any important knowledge beyond the limited experience he had accumulated up to the time he began his studies. He may have learned what he is capable of doing as a writer, but not what he *should* be capable of doing now that he has completed his "training." For he has not been required to master a series of specific requirements that might have helped him to measure his creative progress and his future creative potential. It is, therefore, not surprising that he would be reluctant to submit his work to critical scrutiny, for his work would be most unlikely to hold up under such scrutiny. Besides, criticism would not only put to the test his abilities as a writer but raise serious questions about the value of the system that supposedly trained him to become one.

But behind the existing deficiencies in the academic training of writers looms the ultimate problem, one so laden with the weight of

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potential sabotage that one scarcely dares to speak its name. Far too many are called to become students of writing and, given the recruiting zeal of the writing programs, far, far too many are chosen. This is not, however, a matter entirely of uncontrolled bureaucratic greed, for in fairness it should be said that many of the applicants for admission to these programs clearly do seem to be promising, at least when judged on the basis of their qualifying manuscripts. Yet too often the promise they show is of the variety most young people show up to the age of about twenty-five, while other qualities far more essential to the continued productivity of writers are not so immediately detectable. There is no way of knowing, for example, that the promising student will possess the kind of obsessive drive to write, or the subject matter to write about, that will keep him functioning for a lifetime. The sad result in too many cases is that writing students will be led by the initial encouragement they receive to spend wasted years trying to become writers when they really do not have the required abilities. What one in fact observes in the majority of writing students is brightness and eagerness, perhaps a certain creative flair, and a religious regard for the holy office of the writer. Rarely do they strike one as having the qualities of mind and spirit that make for excellence. Most of them appear to be nice, well-adjusted, rather conventional, not particularly literary young people who might be equally competent as students of law or dentistry and, therefore, should probably *be* students of law or dentistry.

It would appear that the writing programs have not yet devised a way to reproduce or incorporate into their curricula the conditions that are best suited to the creation of writers. While it is perfectly true that clonal fabrications of writers proliferate in these programs at an astounding rate, the outlook for their future success remains uncertain. But as some signs already indicate, the future for many of them may hold little more than the production of small, sleek clonal fabrications of literature.

Part of the problem is that a fair number of real writers have already been formed psychologically to become writers long before they are old enough to enter a program. If one can trust the authority of literary biographies and the reminiscences of many literary figures of the past, it would seem that at some time in childhood or early adolescence writers typically learn that somehow they are different from others, that there is a detached and perversely watchful ingredient in their natures that causes them to stand just outside those experiences to which their contemporaries so robustly and mindlessly give themselves. Without always being aware of it, writers tend to reenact over and over again, each in his own way, that poignant moment when Mann's Tonio Kröger looks on at the dance and half-despises, half-envies the happy people who are totally and unself-consciously caught up in what they are doing.

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But the envy in their case, as in Kröger's, gives way to a superior sense of being the sole custodians of judgment and prophecy, perceiving the scene and foretelling the rest, and knowing that they alone through their artistry will be able to give it a coherence and meaning quite beyond the comprehension of the participants. So the writer becomes a witness and something of an outsider, doing his work alone and in secret, and in the end not only being fully aware of his otherness but coming to coddle and cultivate it because it forms the perspective necessary to his imaginative re-creation of life.

Behind his knowledge is pride and a feeling that, like the boy in Joyce's "Araby," he is struggling to bear the chalice of his art and otherness safely "through a throng of foes"—those foes being as always the average, the orthodox, the sanctimonious, and the collective. Therefore, a sanctimonious community of writers would be repugnant to him because his entire relation to reality is defined by his productive isolation from community. Perhaps only when he becomes successful can he view other writers as acceptable fellow workers in the field, but even then the association is strained and laced with suspicion. For he defines himself in relation to them in the way that he defines himself in relation to community—by his difference from them, by the extent to which they do not share his vision of the world and do not intrude upon his imaginative territory but keep within the boundaries of their own.

It is conceivable that at the outset a writing program might give him temporary reassurance that there are others like himself, but again only to strengthen his conviction finally that no one is like himself, no one sees or writes as he does. If as a result of workshop experiences in which critical judgments are arrived at by consensus and his work is criticized for being original this conviction is called into question, then his ability to function as he must will gradually be eroded away until, if he fails to escape in time, he may well come to share the fate of Henry James's Isabel Archer who, for all her fastidious idealism and determination to lead a superior life, ends in her marriage to Osmond by being "ground in the very mill of the conventional."

Of course by capitulating to that fate he will probably become eligible to join the fraternity of academic writers and may even be invited to give a reading from his work before an audience of his fellows, who will now have no reason not to listen respectfully to his words and applaud him with the greatest enthusiasm when he is finished.

III

Early training in the graduate schools of creative writing may well account, at least in part, for the fact that in their subsequent careers a surprising number of the newer writers have produced work that is

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technically conservative, stylistically bland, and often extremely modest in intention, with little about it that could possibly be offensive or provocative or stimulating to anyone. They have been well taught, after all, to avoid taking risks or indulging in the kind of technical experimentation that might provoke an accusation of originality, and to concentrate instead on the slight, safely manageable effect, preferably a briefly rendered, rather wispy moment of experience during which nothing particularly happens and out of which arises no large revelation or crescendo of meaning but at most some faint murmur of irony or pity that is often so faint as to be nearly inaudible.

It is a kind of writing, particularly in the shorter form, that bears a very close resemblance to the scenic blips of television, a fact that is not surprising in a generation whose perceptions have been doped and dulled by years of exposure to the electronic anesthesia of that medium. Television projects glimpses of experience as if seen from a train that is moving so fast that the connection of one glimpse to another is often impossible to perceive. The glimpses may follow one another in temporal sequence, but it is not a sequence in which meaning is normally accrued or progress is made toward a definitive conclusion. This happens and then this happens and then this happens and then the train disappears into a tunnel and nothing happens. Almost everything that occurs on television is instantly forgettable, and so are most of the stories of, among others, Raymond Carver, Ann Beattie, Jayne Anne Phillips, Bobbie Ann Mason, and Amy Hempel. In each case the memory is given nothing to retain, no form in which the harmonious relation of part to part creates a pattern on which the mind is able to construct a memory.

One obvious explanation for this is that the people and situations so many of these stories concern are too trivial to be remembered. The people are too often shadows without substance and because so little information about them is provided, they tend to be as indefinable as strangers seen in a snapshot that another stranger has dropped in the street. The situations in which they are presented are also like snapshots, static TV images of ordinary day-to-day life during which strangers exchange fragments of enigmatic conversation while sitting in kitchens drinking beer or driving in shabby cars on the way to someone's ex-spouse's house.

There is no evidence that these experiences are meant to coalesce into drama or so arrange themselves as to produce some climactic insight into a truth about the human condition. They are simply offered as bare minimalist reproductions of a reality so mundane and so completely unilluminated by language or theme that they never become attractive subjects for fiction but remain the raw materials for a fiction that is yet to be written. As a rule, no one feature of the depicted experience is given

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emphasis over another. Everything exists on the same flat plane of inconsequence; hence, no clue is offered as to which element in the action is meant to communicate the meaning of the story—if, indeed, any meaning is intended. As Madison Bell, in a now infamous essay in *Harper's* in April 1986 called "Less is Less," very perceptively observed about the stories of Ann Beattie: "At every important juncture the stories insist on their own lack of depth. . . . In each there is a remarkably skillful accretion of realistic surface detail—beneath which nothing happens. Each, finally, seems to be informed by a sort of polite nihilism."

This effect of nihilism is, in fact, the one element in the stories not only of Beattie but of Carver and the others that leaves any kind of clear impression on the mind. They seem consistently to suggest that human life in general and human experience in particular do not count for very much of anything and are equally consignable to oblivion. Their minimalist technique, furthermore, exactly mirrors this view, its rigid anal retentiveness, its paucity of evaluative nuance reaffirming in constipated language and empty gestures the point made by the authorial monotone: that there is very little to be said for or about people because they and their lives are so utterly inconsequential. If the stories convey the impression that there is nothing beneath the realistic surfaces of the action, the reason is that in fact there is nothing.

This is perhaps the most important respect in which these contemporary writers may be said to betray a connection with the negativism that pervaded and energized so much of classic modernist literature and that remains alive in the work of many of their older contemporaries. But it is a negativism that, in their expressions of it, seems generated in a vacuum. It is not a response to, nor does it represent an attack on any specific social or political injustice. It is not offered as an attempt to expose the spiritual bankruptcies of modern culture or as a call for some kind of moral reform. In fact, a startling characteristic of such writing is that it expresses absolutely no discernible attitude of any kind toward society as a whole, no critical consciousness of the nature or quality of the milieu in which the characters carry on their insignificant lives. Physical and social environment scarcely exists in the background of the depicted action and appears to have nothing to do with influencing the feelings or the behavior of those involved in the action. Yet the deathly atmosphere of *The Waste Land* overlies everything even as it exists entirely in isolation and without the kind of support provided by the generative context of Eliot's poem. There at least we learned what it was that had died and what was needed to bring about its regeneration. For these writers it would seem that it is not human dignity or religious belief or social justice that has lost meaning but, as I have said, life itself,

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which is plainly no longer worth living and very nearly no longer worth writing about.

All this would appear to suggest that two important modernist developments have effectively come to an end in the work of these contemporary writers: the great tradition of realistic protest sustained in large part by the cultural estrangement of many of the writers involved, and the equally great tradition of technical innovation and experiment that, from Joyce and Eliot to Pynchon and Gaddis, produced the imperial and apocalyptic poem and novel of rich intellectual complexity and that embodied the ambitious view that literary works can and should become artistic microcosms of a whole society or the modern world. All that visibly remains of the influence of these traditions on the newer writers is the aforementioned negativism that has no specified meaning or object and a severely delimited realism that is also non-referential, that is not used in the service of any idea about the nature of human experience or society but simply to express vague feelings of futility.

One explanation for this may be that, unlike most of their predecessors, these writers are not only not estranged from their culture but seem to have no impressions of, or relation to it at all. In fact, they show no symptoms of having vital social or intellectual interests of any kind or any sense of belonging to a literary tradition. Above all, they appear never to have possessed the traditional desire of writers to be as original and as completely different from one another as possible. Perhaps because of the homogenizing influence of their training in the creative writing programs, they seem virtually interchangeable, and any of their novels and stories might conceivably have been written by almost any one of them. It may be, however, that in their resemblance to one another they have found such strength as they are likely ever to possess. For it has enabled publishers to market their various works as if they were identical, one mass-produced product with the same approved ingredients in every package. "A perfect uniformity," writes Madison Bell in his essay, "has become the key to the very successful promotion of this new mainstream . . . fiction. 'Like Type O blood,' reads the back jacket of *Shiloh*, 'Bobbie Ann Mason's fiction can be given to almost everyone.' " But the problem is that, unlike Type O blood, a fiction that can be given to almost everyone is certain to be invigorating to no one. In fact, many of the stories produced not only by Mason but by some of the other mainstream writers belong to that odd species of bloodless fiction so cherished by the editors of *The New Yorker*, in which, not surprisingly, a great deal of their work has been published. It is a fiction that looks soothingly pretty on the page, can be read without effort, would indeed not nourish, offend, or excite anyone, and is fashionably uniform and without point. For a transfusion of real vitality one needs to

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look to those creative differences and originalities of talent that seem, year by year, to diminish in number as the university training schools of literary production turn out look-alike writers and a fiction of sleek designer decor.

Versions of Corot

THOMAS CARPER

Chez Corot il n'y a que travail et contemplation.
—Paul Valéry

Pictures taken in his fifties show
A somewhat dumpy being, stout and squat,
A heavy face whose overarching brow
Half hides the eyes. A photograph is not
A clear glass, or a window on the soul.
There at the easel, where his hand has drawn
A mirror's version with the sure control
Of mastery, his portrait has put on
More than mere beauty, more than harmony
Of line and color organizing space
With such conviction anyone can see
This painter dominating time and place—
Here, through a surface self, is ardently wrought
Integrity of living work and thought.

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Minority Faculty Hiring

Problems and Prospects

JOHN H. BUNZEL

In 1972, a special order was issued by the Midwest civil rights director of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (now known as the Department of Health and Human Services) that called on colleges and universities to give preference to women and minority group members over better-qualified white male applicants when making faculty and staff appointments. HEW officials insisted that the new requirement, contained in a revised set of affirmative action guidelines that dealt with hiring practices, was necessary to correct the imbalance of women and minorities on college faculties. The requirement stipulated that "neither minority nor female employees should be required to possess higher qualifications than those of the lowest qualified incumbent." The HEW officials told the *Detroit News* that this new directive, which had been sent to the University of Michigan and nine other major institutions (including Harvard and Columbia) and was to be enforced on more than two thousand campuses with federal contracts, meant that universities were now required "to reject male (white) and nonminority applicants who might have better credentials than female and minority applicants so long as the latter have qualifications *better than the least qualified member presently employed by a department.*" (My emphasis.) Presumably HEW did not care if the members of the department voted by secret ballot or a show of hands when they bestowed the honor of "least qualified" on one of their faculty colleagues.

HEW had only one concern to relay to the presidents of these universities: Less than one percent of their faculties was black, and this indicates discrimination, and something needed to be done about it—fast. These officials seldom stressed the importance of academic qualifications or other skills for a faculty appointment. They simply

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assumed that what may be a legitimate inference in considering the presence or absence of discrimination in hiring individuals in a beer plant or an assembly line was similarly true for all levels of college instruction. HEW was unable or unwilling to see that its proposed requirement would lower academic quality, a question that seemed of no interest to the agency. As it turned out, the tactic of forcing an institution to hire women and minority faculty members less qualified than other applicants was too much for the then president of the University of Michigan. "To say we must hire someone whose qualifications may be only slightly better than the lowest qualified current members of a department is absurd," he said. With the help of Michigan's (then) Congressman Gerald R. Ford, House Minority Leader, who took strong exception to the misguided order, the Office of Civil Rights made an about-face and rescinded the requirement.

It would be hard to find many members of the academic community who do not believe that minority faculty members are an important element that higher education cannot afford to overlook and that the necessary efforts must be made available to increase faculty opportunities for students who have been set at a disadvantage by race and background but who want to get the Ph.D. and become college professors. But in the early 1970s there were already clear signs that some figures in Washington were determined to move higher education in worrisome directions.

On a weekday morning in May 1972, the Chancellor's Council of Presidents of the California State University system met for two hours with staff members of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights to listen to their views about affirmative action and what the nineteen campuses in the California system needed to do to be "in compliance" with government regulations. It was already known that these university presidents regarded affirmative action as a moral command authorizing the federal government to take enforcement action against colleges and universities if they were not taking sufficiently positive steps to hire more women and minorities. What the university presidents were soon to discover was that they also sought to play a decisive role in making American higher education fit their own egalitarian model.*

John Buggs, the Civil Rights Commission's staff director, opened the meeting by informing the presidents that affirmative action had no real meaning unless it was results-oriented. What was now needed in the faculty hiring process, he said, was a new set of qualifying criteria.

* The comments that follow are based on my notes of the meeting, which took place on May 25, 1972. The staff members of the Civil Rights Commission present were John Buggs, Staff Director; Jess Miller, Director of the Office of Federal Evaluations; and Maywanda Michael, whose duties involved the monitoring of HEW-related matters.

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Where an adequate pool of qualified persons was not available among minority people, employers should develop a labor pool of such people to the point that it was available. He had reviewed all of the campus affirmative action policies, he told us, and while they expressed good intentions, he could not tell from the documents if there were adequate numbers of women and minorities on the faculty and staff. That is why goals and timetables must be established—to overcome any such deficiencies.

Mr. Miller spoke enthusiastically about some of the state colleges' plans that involved "good features such as 'set asides,' " which is the practice of not hiring available qualified white males but holding jobs open until women or members of certain minority groups can be found to fill them. Such plans were ultimately dropped because, as several of us pointed out, they were against the law. There is agreement, Miller reminded us, that it is necessary to increase minority employment, and the name of the game is results.

Following Miller's comments, the floor was opened to questions and answers, including the following exchanges that clearly revealed, among other things, the feelings of the commission's staff members about the specific traditions and problems of colleges and universities.

In determining the availability of minority people, one university president asked, Do you look to the percentage of biologists that are black or to the availability of black biologists?

John Buggs replied that goals and timetables have to be used with some reason. If we were to stick to a percentage ratio, the results would be irrational. Jess Miller added that it is necessary to look at the number of minority people with requisite skills in the area in which the employer can recruit. But, Maywanda Michael said, it is necessary to consider equivalency criteria. Thus, one must look not only to the number of black Ph.D.'s, for example, but to the holders of master's degrees and black people in the particular field. The term used to describe this is *qualifiable,* Miller added.

Doesn't this mean unqualified? it was asked. No, Miss Michael said. The objective of affirmative action is equalized results. Some traditional criteria are applied so stringently as to result in exclusion. What is necessary is to consider all of those people who are qualified in a certain sense. One must ask why a Ph.D. is necessary in order to teach.

If a Ph.D. is required of all others in a particular department, another university president asked, are you saying that minority persons should be excluded from this requirement?

It is necessary to review all guidelines under which the institution has worked for years with respect to job requisites, Miller said. As in the

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case of industry, higher education may be called upon for a "job redesign." Miss Michael added that one might have a good teacher even without a Ph.D. So the real criterion for qualification is equivalency. Several of the university presidents were by now visibly upset by the suggestion that higher education could simply be "redesigned" like any other business or industry. It was explained, for example, that each of the nineteen campuses almost exclusively hired persons who had a Ph.D. or expected to complete their dissertation within a limited period of time. In response, they were told that in the past they had been satisfied with less, that the master's degree would in ten years again be a legitimate "entry level," and that they should now make use of it to bring about more affirmative action results.

You are missing the point, a university president said. We hardly ever hire a person with a master's degree and nothing more. Are we being told that we should drop the Ph.D. requirement?

Right, said Miss Michael. If some courses can be instructed without the Ph.D., then persons can be hired without that degree to teach them.

But if we move from qualified to qualifiable, a university president said, we will have more grievance cases than anyone has ever heard of. People will file formal charges against the university on the grounds that they were denied tenure because of a failure to attain something that persons already in the department do not have. The result would be that we could not upgrade any department.

John Buggs said that he knew a man who is probably the greatest physics teacher in the world, who has just completed a series of lectures at universities on the Continent, and he has no Ph.D. The suggestion that there are great teachers without the Ph.D. is irrelevant, a university president countered. The traditional criterion for hiring faculty at first-class institutions is the Ph.D. Even if adequate criteria to measure teacher performance existed, we could still fill the classroom with Ph.D.'s. Furthermore, to establish different criteria so that we had first- and second-class faculty appointments, with minority group members constituting second-class faculty—that in itself would be a disaster.

At this point another university president said that he objected to anyone in HEW claiming that it has the authority or good sense to tell colleges and universities what they can or should do programmatically. The issue is not the number of black Ph.D.'s available, but whether universities can find people to fill their particular needs. The "results theory" amounts to a statement that the end justifies the means. Furthermore, the word "qualifiable" is an unfortunate term and does not exist in Executive Order Number 4. The issue is whether a person is qualified by relevant criteria.

Whenever we desperately want to get something, John Buggs said,

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we do it. Universities that want to hire black athletes somehow manage to do it because they are willing to spend the necessary effort. If they can do it for athletes, they can do it for teachers. That is not an appropriate analogy, one of the university presidents shot back. An athlete is only there for a few years, and the quality of an institution is not as affected by a student athlete as it is by a faculty appointment.

Then another of the presidents averred that there had been a deep ethical and social sensitivity on his campus for a very long time. It existed before he arrived, and he had been there for seventeen years. He wanted to make clear that he resented a federal agency telling him what is morally right and socially correct. Moreover, he added, as a member of a minority group himself, he would find it offensive to believe that he was hired as president in order to meet some goal with respect to minority hiring; and the moral superiority and preaching that he had been listening to this morning made him sick.

Several presidents at the meeting told the commission staff members that there was probably no segment of American society with a greater reservoir of goodwill toward affirmative action and the efforts aimed at ending discrimination and remedying the effects of past discrimination than higher education. Virtually everyone agreed that women and minorities should finally have equal access to all the jobs that for so long had been too often denied them. Furthermore, college administrators were anxious to sit down with federal civil rights officials to talk frankly and constructively about how to deal with these problems effectively.

But what emerged from the meeting confirmed the growing suspicion that many bureaucrats in Washington were less interested in working together with universities to change higher education for the better, actively and steadily, than in bringing about a statistically acceptable representation of women and minorities, quickly and across the board, by indiscriminate fiat. The presidents tried to explain that affirmative action is not simply a program that yields gains and benefits; it also entails demonstrable costs and consequences. To believe otherwise is to fail to understand that what one person gains under affirmative action may well be taken away from someone else. Furthermore, they pointed out that the notion of equal results is especially mischievous when it is seen to be giving away the principle of individual merit and accomplishment that is central to the integrity of higher education.

During the past two decades there has been an increase in the participation of under-represented minority groups on traditionally white faculties. However, despite the enactment of affirmative action plans by virtually every college and university, the rate of progress for minority faculty has decreased in recent years and has even regressed for

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black faculty. In 1988, in the wake of racial incidents and as charges of racial exclusion mounted on white campuses around the country, a number of institutions turned to more aggressive methods to attract members of racial minorities. The University of Wisconsin agreed to find seventy new minority faculty members by 1991. Williams College set minority faculty hiring quotas of 20 percent by the early 1990s. A Smith College study has recommended 20 percent by 1995. The president of Stanford has called for an increase in the number of minority faculty by thirty over the next ten years. Duke University has asked each of its fifty departments to hire at least one new black faculty member by 1993, and those that do not meet the goal will be barred from further faculty hiring until their affirmative action efforts are reviewed. (Duke has not indicated where it is going to find such talent in the next three years. The goal is not believed to be a realistic one.)

Why aren't there more black faculty members? Many administrators and professors say it is because our educational institutions are not making the extra effort to recruit the qualified candidates who are available. Others disagree, claiming that most colleges and universities give serious attention to minority hiring and are committed to affirmative action appointment procedures that seek a greater ethnic mix in their faculties. Some students and faculty members charge that campus authorities do not respond to the special needs and concerns of blacks and therefore view the presence of racism and the absence of black professors as part of a "seamless web." But a stubborn fact remains: In the last ten years there has been a substantial decline in the number of blacks earning doctoral degrees, which means that a serious shortage of well-qualified black faculty can be expected in the future.

The evidence of the problem confronting higher education is made clear by some compelling data:

Of the 31,770 Ph.D.'s earned in 1986, the percentage of American blacks receiving doctorates was 3.6 percent, which was 26.5 percent fewer than in 1977. The number of Ph.D.'s awarded to black males dropped by more than half, whereas the number awarded to U.S. black women was more than 15 percent higher than in 1977. In 1986, black women received almost 61 percent of all doctorates awarded to black candidates.

Among blacks, more than half of the doctorates earned in 1986 were in education (421) and slightly fewer than a fifth were in the social sciences (163). In 1987, according to the National Science Foundation, blacks earned only 222, or 1.8 percent, of the 12,480 doctorates awarded to U.S. citizens in graduate science and engineering. Of 290 doctorates awarded in electrical engineering, none went to black students, and of

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243 doctorates in computer and information science, only two went to blacks. Blacks received 3 of 281 doctorates in chemical engineering, 2 of 240 doctorates in mechanical engineering, and 5 of 698 doctorates in physics and astronomy. In biology the proportion was slightly better—45 of 2,971 doctoral degrees went to blacks. In 1978, there were 278 black science and engineering doctorates, or 2.1 percent of the total. By comparison, Hispanics and Asians have earned steadily higher numbers of science doctorates since 1978, although the numbers remain low for Hispanics. Blacks, however, are the only ethnic group in which the number of science doctorates has declined.

In 1975, universities were the major employer of new Ph.D.'s, but in 1986 this was no longer true. For black doctorates, there were both absolute and proportional reductions in the number who were planning to enter the academic world between 1975 and 1986. For example, in 1986 fewer than half (272 out of 547 doctorates) of black Ph.D.'s had plans for academic careers, compared to more than two-thirds (427 out of 633 doctorates) in 1975. In education, which has been a traditional field for black Ph.D.'s, the decline has been especially sharp, dropping from 225 to 105 between 1975 and 1986. (As noted above, this reduction is significant because education accounts for the highest proportion of all black doctorates entering academic institutions.)

Postdoctoral training has traditionally helped newly minted Ph.D.'s become competitive for top faculty positions. In recent years there has been a positive shift toward additional training among minorities, with Asian-Americans far exceeding other minority groups in postdoctoral study. Hispanics ranked second, and their rates were about twice that of black postdoctorates. Less than 10 percent of all black Ph.D.'s had plans for postdoctoral study in 1986.

The major competitors with universities for black (and other new) Ph.D.'s has been government and industry. Two of the most important reasons given by black Ph.D.'s for working outside of their doctoral specialty are that jobs in non-Ph.D. fields offered more attractive career possibilities and better salaries. Another reason for the extraordinarily low number of blacks earning Ph.D.'s in science is that black students with a bachelor's degree in the sciences are heavily recruited by industry, where they can earn salaries comparable to, or only slightly less than, what they would earn after four to six years in graduate school.

Faculty appointments in the social sciences and humanities correspond to the higher proportion of Ph.D.'s who earned doctoral degrees in these fields. Except for Asian-Americans, who were about equally represented in life science and social science departments in four-year institutions, most minority faculty were employed in social science and humanities departments. In four-year institutions, compared to the

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national rate, blacks were over-represented in the social sciences and education. In both two- and four-year institutions, black faculty were under-represented in physical and life science departments. According to a report in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, there were no black Ph.D.'s in 1986 in such fields as astronomy, geology, European history, classics, architecture, law or German, Italian, Spanish, or Russian language or literature, among others.

Academic salaries generally rank far below salaries in business and private industry, and the differences in academic and non-academic salaries of minorities are no exception. For example, the median salary of black Ph.D.'s in universities in 1985 was $6,982 lower (16 percent) than for black Ph.D.'s in non-academic employment—and the gap widens as the years since receiving the doctorate increase. However, among Ph.D.'s employed in academic institutions, black faculty generally earned higher median salaries than members of other minority groups, regardless of years since the doctorate, except for Asian-Americans, whose salaries were higher than blacks' among Ph.D.'s who had held the doctorate for 16 years.

Teaching is the primary activity of black and Hispanic faculty in contemporary universities. They are also more frequently involved in administration. Compared to Asian-Americans, few black faculty are engaged in research. (Asian-Americans are most likely to report research activity as a primary activity and least likely to be in administration.) Analyses that followed faculty over a nine-year period reveal that black faculty were less likely to be tenured or promoted at the same rate or in the same time span as Asian-Americans or Hispanics, who had tenure and promotion rates higher than the national average.

In light of the fact that the pool of black Ph.D.'s has shrunk to its lowest level since 1975 (and shows no signs of quick recovery), colleges and universities will find it increasingly difficult to keep the promises they make about hiring more and more black faculty. One of the issues that remains especially critical is the extent to which the commitment to increase the percentage of blacks in college faculties can co-exist with the maintenance of long-standing standards—standards for the Ph.D., for example—in hiring and retention. It is entirely possible that present professional standards will continue inadvertently to keep the number of black faculty appointments disproportionately low. The outcome of that unhappy situation may then be to intensify the effort to discredit the standards themselves. Some people have argued that perhaps we should maintain standards but then deliberately depart from them in the name of social justice by adopting a system of preferential or quota hiring of minority applicants who are acknowledged to be underqualified. The problem is that after that process has been operating for a time, we still won't know if this strategy has been successful.

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The horns of that dilemma are sharp indeed. Who in actual practice would be willing to state openly that an underqualified faculty member has performed poorly? Who would be willing to count the high costs that might ultimately far outweigh the immediate benefits gained by making exceptions to traditional professional criteria? It is not that underqualified appointees can never become qualified; and there may indeed be times when mere formal qualification is meaningless. But when apprehension about social injustice toward a group prevents the making of clearheaded and responsible judgments about individuals, when one feels compelled to assert in all cases that the underqualified did as well as the qualified, what, then, happens to the well-established professional criteria? (The argument is often made that academic hiring frequently violates merit criteria—so why get upset about affirmative action hiring? The most honest response is to acknowledge that the charge is sometimes true but also to insist that failure to act always according to principle does not discredit the principle. Rather than discarding it, efforts should be concentrated on making it more consistently honored.)

One of the serious implications of having undefined, academically irrelevant criteria initially is that it sets the stage for the special claims of ethnic groups that only they are able to understand and pass judgment on the merits of members of their groups. If academic criteria are ruled out from the beginning, it is virtually impossible to legitimate their use later on. Consider still another issue. As the *Christian Science Monitor* has reported, a significant number of student and faculty activists have demanded that black faculty be automatically granted tenure as a form of affirmative action. At the University of Michigan, the United Coalition Against Racism has demanded that all black professors be given immediate tenure and special pay incentives. Yet to abandon scholarly merit as at least "the ideal of tenure" raises serious questions about academic quality and integrity. Furthermore, black faculty members who currently have tenure strongly oppose automatic or unearned tenure because it is not only condescending but diminishes their own legitimate and hard-won achievements.

The use of double standards is not, of course, confined to blacks. Colleges and universities have been bending the admissions rules for athletes, children of alumni, and others for a long time. But as the sociologist Christopher Jencks has observed, not only are the long-run effects of double standards for blacks especially pernicious, but the longer the double standard persists, the worse those consequences become. "As more and more blacks benefit at one point or another from reverse discrimination," Jencks writes, "fewer and fewer know how they would do if people stopped making special allowances for their presumed handicaps." White stereotypes about black incompetence also

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grow stronger, Jencks adds, and "what once looked to liberal whites like a temporary, transitional problem now looks like a permanent condition." The time has come, says Jencks, to insist that "no affirmative action program should be adopted whose de facto result is reverse discrimination."

It is impossible to talk about increasing the number of blacks on college faculties without considering the serious deficiencies in academic skills of black students. More specifically, there will be little improvement in black faculty representation unless and until there is a progressively larger number of black college students who go on to graduate school. Only then will they become a significant source of future highly qualified teachers and scholars. But the problem has much deeper roots. We are a society that in recent years has been increasingly making serious efforts to achieve equality of opportunity. It has also been a time of growing concern about the quality of the nation's public schools, resulting in a demand by the American people for higher standards for both teachers and students. Yet efforts to raise educational standards run up against the certainty that, whatever standard one sets, some people will not be able to meet it. If one assumes some standard distribution of talents, there will always be people who fall below the set level. In most countries, the problem this creates is that of adding a social class factor in achieving the standard: the lower the class, the smaller the number of those who reach the standard. But in the United States the problem is exacerbated by ethnic-racial factors. Simply put, more blacks and Hispanic-Americans fail (though of late the latter proportionately less than the former). The raising of standards comes into direct conflict with the effort to achieve proportions of blacks and Hispanic-Americans at each level of the educational system that roughly match the proportions in the population at large.

The problem is today overwhelmingly—though not exclusively—a problem affecting American blacks. In discussing the many efforts in the last twenty years to close the gap between black and white achievement, the Harvard sociologist Nathan Glazer has pointed out that, because of this continuing disparity, any attempt to apply a standard of competency across the board means that more blacks must fail. "Whether we apply that standard to competency tests for high school diplomas, or exit examinations from high school, or math and science requirements for entry into college, or law school or medical school admission tests, or requirements for entry into graduate programs of any kind, or minimal qualifications for teachers, or qualifications such as the Ph.D. for college teachers—wherever we try to apply a standard we can be sure . . . that more, considerably more, blacks than whites will fail."

Critics of the competency movement charge that the tests are dis-

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criminatory. Black students perform poorly, they say, because the tests are racially biased (though one is hard-pressed to understand how tests that measure mathematical reasoning and problem solving can be biased), or because many of the black students taking them are the victims of inferior segregated schools (a more valid claim). Their solution is to abandon the tests. The problem, however, is that low scores on the tests are more often produced by a weakness in the student's grasp of basic skills than by the tests themselves. The distinction is important. The tests may reflect deprivations in the unequal background of many minority students, but that is very different from saying that the tests are to blame for differences in performance.

When officials at the predominantly black Grambling State University confronted the dismal record of minority teacher candidates on Louisiana's required certification exam in 1980, they resolved to fight the low test scores rather than the test itself. As the new dean of Grambling's college of education explained, "The University took the attitude that if other students can pass the test, then our students can too—and will." And they did. Buttressed by program revisions, new personnel, tighter standards, outside funds, and university-wide support, the turnaround has been impressive. In the years immediately following the state's certification mandate, fewer than 5 percent of the school's education graduates were passing the National Teacher Examinations. Today, 85 percent of the Grambling students who take the test pass.

The reigning dogma in many quarters that the under-representation of blacks on college faculties is the result of bias or discrimination does not explain the size of the achievement gap between blacks and whites before they ever get to college. Consider some harsh realities:

According to U.S. Census figures, in 1986 more than one-third of blacks eighteen to nineteen years old did not complete secondary school, but three-quarters of the white students did.

The National Assessment of Education Progress reports that black high school graduates attain literacy levels only slightly above those of white eighth-graders.

A National Science Foundation study has pinpointed mathematics skills as demonstrating a serious gap in learning between black and white children. By the end of elementary school, as many as half of the minority children in Montgomery County, Maryland, are so far behind that they cannot keep up with the mathematics curriculum. The study also showed that failure in mathematics can lead to below-average scores on a student's Scholastic Aptitude Test—"because," in the words of the study's author, "every additional year of mathematics raises a student's score on this important examination by an average of 70 points." Not

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surprisingly, therefore, the under-representation of blacks in mathematics preparation at the elementary and secondary level is a major reason why they are unlikely to choose science-related fields as majors in college.

In 1984, 617,000 blacks were enrolled in four-year institutions of higher education. By 1986, the number of black students had dropped by 2,000, the only group that moved downward.

Fewer and fewer black students are graduating from college. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 977,000 or 7 percent of all blacks beyond the age of twenty-two have a college education.

These are distressing figures. What can be done about the significant disparities between black and white students? There are no certain answers, particularly since, to take but one example, what may work for a group of black youths who are alienated from the demands of learning will be very different from the strategies that may help those who want to succeed in school but are struggling to keep up. It would be foolish to think that discrimination no longer exists or to depreciate the fact that most blacks begin from a disadvantaged starting point in entering any level of education because of the cumulative burdens of past and existing racism whose consequences white Americans cannot possibly comprehend. Yet it is also true that discrimination has too often been used to explain almost everything, thus avoiding factors that could contribute to a deeper understanding of existing problems. Many blacks—one thinks especially of the vocal "black power" minority—embrace a kind of determinism that leads them to put all the blame on society, which the gifted black writer Shelby Steele has described as "a hidden investment in black victimization." Whatever blacks may feel they are collectively entitled to as social victims, says Steele, they are all too often individually demoralized, thus depriving them of their energy and will as individuals to *resist* the coercive effects of being "relegated to the sidelines of American life." It means that "society" becomes reified and "white" culture "demonized" so that failure may sometimes become a source of pride rather than of defeat. "Blaming society" can also make it all too easy to savage society by all sorts of anti-social (and even criminal) behavior since "society" is the enemy.

Our schools today are increasingly being asked to take on many of society's worst problems, as if they could curb the rise among disadvantaged youths of drug and alcohol abuse, violent street crime, teenage pregnancies, and attempted suicides. It is an impractical expectation—even if there were adequate resources. A much stronger case can be made for letting schools concentrate on what should be their primary mission: strong instructional leadership that will foster the academic

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preparation and performance of students. The learning-gap problems of black high school students are severely affected by the courses they take—or, more properly, do not take. A 1988 analysis by the Department of Education showed that only 23 percent of black students who graduated in 1987 had taken four years of English and three years each of mathematics, science, and social studies (too often because they had been counseled into the wrong courses, or because the courses were not offered). This is compared with 54 percent of Asian-Americans and 31 percent of whites.

There is no easy way to combat the declining representation of blacks in our colleges and universities. But the place to start is in the kindergarten and elementary school years, when an emphasis on mastering basic skills should begin for all children, and when parents should be reading to their children and instilling in their young minds the ability (in the words of public television's Robert MacNeil) "to think in linear fashion before television turns them to mush." Parents who are surprised by the recently arrived young people from Southeast Asia who quickly move to the top of the class in almost every course should note that these youngsters spend three or four hours studying every night. According to a 1987 study by the California Department of Education, the more time students spend on homework, the higher their achievement scores in all grades and subjects. It is equally important to make sure that black students are not shunted into the Mickey Mouse courses; that if they (or any other students) have done failing work, they will not be advanced to the next grade; that school administrators, teachers, and parents are more concerned that they acquire English, writing, and mathematics skills than with the mix of students in a classroom or school district; and that members of the clergy, social workers, and other professionals publicly promote individual responsibility and the ideal of self-help that have long been associated with progress and success for all Americans. All of these initiatives, and others, including the alleviation of social and economic conditions that disproportionately impair black youth, could help reverse what has been an ebbing tide of black undergraduates.

If there is ground for optimism, it is in the ambition and dedication of educators, policymakers, business and labor leaders, members of the clergy, as well as individual citizens and groups throughout the country, who are participating in various projects designed to boost the academic achievement of minority students from kindergarten through graduate school. One might easily be tempted to dismiss these and many similar initiatives as too little, of "thinking and acting too small." But that would be a mistake. They are necessary steps (though certainly not the only ones) not only because they will help to interrupt the cycle of high minority failure rates in our public schools, but because they are

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inextricably linked to what must be done in the years ahead to ensure a growing pool of minority faculty talent. Arguments for more (and more aggressive) affirmative action measures to increase the number of minorities on college faculties have been made for over two decades, including the setting of quantitative goals and timetables for minority recruitment and retention. But they have been insufficient because the real but unstated aim of many affirmative action programs has been to bring about a dramatic equalization of conditions for certain groups through preferential hiring and proportional representation—what the Carnegie Commission has called "an equality of forced results"—rather than to concentrate their efforts in a serious attempt to help the large number of young children who are struggling to succeed in school.

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The Mysterious Allen Upward

DONALD DAVIE

ALLEN UPWARD (B. 1863) REMAINS A MYSTERY MAN. I have no hope here of dispelling the mystery, not even of casting anything but very tentative light on it. My intention is only to emphasize that the mystery persists; that it is unaccountable; and that, so long as it persists, our pretensions to chart the intellectual history of our times, or the times of our grandfathers, are hollow. It is not after all as if we were dealing with a figure from the sixteenth century or earlier; Upward died by his own hand no longer ago than 1926. How can it be that a figure so historically recent, by no means a recluse but on the contrary gregarious and a prolific self-promoter, should have been consigned to oblivion so conclusively that, so far as I can make out, there exists not a single sketchy impression of him from those who knew him in life, and of his many books even the best libraries can muster only a few? This inquiry, therefore, if it can be dignified by that name, is an inquiry into the processes of cultural transmission or non-transmission. And if I may anticipate my conclusion, the case seems to prove that the period of Edward VII and George V, of Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, and since them the age of computerized information retrieval, no more ensures the continuity of historical memory than did the times of Henry VIII or Edward VI. In fact, rather less so.

The mystery of Upward is encapsulated in an issue ten years old of that eccentric and unreliable but invaluable London magazine, *Agenda*, which in 1978–79 carried two essays about Upward, one by Kenneth Cox, the other by Michael Sheldon. How could the figure that emerges from Michael Sheldon's biographical researches—a flitting opportunist, scaremonger, and demagogue of municipal politics in England, Wales, and Ireland—have written a book, *The Divine Mystery,* which (Kenneth Cox decides) "stands in breadth of view, in novelty of ideas, in clarity of

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exposition and in brilliance of *obiter dicta* at least on a par with the work of Montesquieu"? And if Cox is right, as I'm sure he is (for the name of Montesquieu is not chosen at random), how can it be that such a book should never have been reprinted since its first publication in 1913 until 1976, and then in Santa Barbara, California? Somewhere here there is a scandal; and we cannot as intellectual historians look ourselves in the face until we have probed it.

With every month that passes, the chance of rescuing Upward from oblivion gets slimmer—not just because there can now be hardly anyone left among eyewitnesses who might testify, and not just because under imposed budgetary constraints British libraries at all levels are now shredding seldom-asked-for books from eighty or sixty years ago, but because we get further and further away from sympathizing with or understanding the world of speculation that Upward took for granted. Kenneth Cox is very good about this:

> Opportunities for self-instruction in his time were not bad: many books were cheap and some serious attempts were made to popularise science. Those were the days when educated men still thought it possible to discuss the latest theories, when you could still drop into the British Museum to do some reading and, if you wanted to know about the reformation of the zodiac in 700 B.C., write to the Astronomer Royal. . . .
>
> The mental world Upward inhabited was one where matter not divided into disciplines or bedevilled by politicians is subjected to independent and wide-ranging enquiry. He called himself a scientist and his subject "ontology, commonly called truth."

Nothing could be further from the assumptions and guidelines that govern nowadays the deliberations of bodies like the Royal Society and the British Academy and the Social Science Research Institute, where research proposals are, no doubt scrupulously, vetted by specialist committees and sub-committees. In such a context Upward would not have stood a chance—not of financial support (that would be out of the question), but of recognition in the sense of being taken seriously. The same goes of course for such a contemporary of his as H. G. Wells. The matter is aggravated by the fields (so we think of them, though Upward didn't) that Upward ranged over and ranged across. Cox cites them as: "mythology, comparative religion, anthropology, etymology, theoretical physics and the paranormal." And he pungently and prudently anticipates the objection:

> In these notorious areas amateurs soon lose their footing and proclaim as truth, or at least as plausible speculation, ideas others dismiss as moonshine. The literature of these studies is cluttered with the lucubrations of bookish old

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geezers not quite right in the head: not every Casaubon failed to write his *Key to all mythologies*. What makes Upward any different?

Kenneth Cox has his answer to that question, in two parts; and it is a very good answer. What is interesting is to ask why in Upward's lifetime no one asked the question, let alone answered it, except Ezra Pound and more dubiously A. R. Orage; and since Upward died the question has been asked (obliquely) and answered (partially) only by certain recent commentators on *The Cantos* of Ezra Pound.

These last, of whom I am one, deserve no great credit. Pound from first to last thrust Upward's name on our attention; and beyond a certain stage of sophistication in studies of Pound's poem, the instigation could not be ignored. But all that we Poundians made of Upward was as much of him as could be brought to bear on Pound's poetry. And this is not good enough. To begin with, among those, still a minority of the reading public, who are sure that Pound was a very great though manifestly imperfect poet, there is certainly no agreement that he was a coherent and consistent thinker; accordingly it is abundantly possible to admire Pound for making admirable poetry out of "the lucubrations of bookish old geezers not quite right in the head," Upward among them. In the second place, those of us who are professionally or semi-professionally students of poetry are ourselves infected by the domination of "specialisms." How can we fail to be, since most of us are required at some point to go cap in hand to an institution like the British Academy or its American equivalents like the Guggenheim Foundation? Accordingly there is insistent pressure, which most of us at some point accede to, to regard our concern with poetry as a specialized discipline on a par with other specialized concerns in, say, organic chemistry. It is certainly significant that only poetry has imposed on its students the necessity to take *some* notice of an otherwise obliterated thinker whose cast of mind wasn't fundamentally poetic or literary at all (for Upward's poems and stories are the least valuable of his writings). That attests to the stubborn determination of serious poetry to regard the exertions of the human mind as somewhere, at some level, all one. But because we who have specialized in the study of poetry have just for that reason neglected to consider how that study locks in with others, our consideration of Upward stops short of the point where he is most challenging: that is to say, the point where, as Cox shows, he requires us to rethink the whole map of intellectual endeavor, challenging the accepted demarcations that split that endeavor into bureaucratically manageable fiefdoms.

Either that, or else when our studies force us to a frontier between poetic and other modes of thinking, we lunge across that frontier inconsiderately and foolishly. Thus thirteen years ago, carried beyond

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myself by excitement at Upward's *The New Word* (London, 1908, but possibly written as early as 1896), I quoted from it as follows:

> The story of the waterspout, as it is told in books, shows it to be a brief-lived tree. A cloud is whirling downwards, and thrusting out its whirlpoint towards the sea, like a sucking mouth. The sea below whirls upward, thrusting out its whirlpoint towards the cloud. The two ends meet, and the water swept up in the sea-whirl passes on into the cloud-whirl, and swirls up through it, as it were gain-saying it. . . .
>
> In the ideal waterspout, not only does the water swirl upward through the cloud-whirl, but the cloud swirls downward through the sea-whirl. . . .
>
> The ideal waterspout is not yet complete. The upper half must unfold like a fan, only it unfolds all around like a flower-cup; and it does not leave the cup empty, so that this flower is like a chrysanthemum. At the same time the lower half has unfolded in the same way, till there are two chrysanthemums back to back. . . .
>
> It is strength turning inside out. Such is the true beat of strength, the first beat, the one from which all others part, the beat which we feel in all things that come within our measure, in ourselves, and in our starry world.

Rashly (with a rashness that I must say I was half conscious of) I commented, "Upward of course did not live to see this inspired guess at 'the first beat' astonishingly confirmed experimentally, when the biophysicists Crick and Watson broke the genetic code to reveal 'the double helix' (that's to say, double-vortex)." I accept Cox's reprimand when he writes entertainingly that to see Upward's "inspired guess" thus "confirmed experimentally" is "a pleasant fancy differing only in degree from seeing the invention of the submarine predicted in the Rigveda." It is a true bill: a literary sensibility (mine) got itself carried away into an intellectual world I was not at home in, where for instance *proof* and *experiment* had meanings different from those I was used to.

And yet "a pleasant fancy" seems more dismissive than is called for. It doesn't measure up to the excitement, the heightened awareness, that Upward's sentences provoked in me (and do again, now that I re-read them), nor for the unforeseen analogy that that excitement provoked me to. The formula that Cox offers me is unexceptionable: "It is more sensible to admit that the verbal faculty, while capable at its heights of marvellous insights and syntheses, which may precede and even suggest discoveries (Heisenberg got ideas from Anaximander), produces formulations that as such cannot be proved or applied." And yet I am not clear in what sense the faculty in Upward that produced these sentences can be called precisely verbal; nor, while accepting that such formulations cannot as such be proved, am I sure that they cannot be applied. The important point to my mind is that in these sentences by Upward we

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experience a powerful mind thinking powerfully about the physical and the non-physical world; and it seems wrong and self-defeating for us to scout and ignore his apprehensions merely because we cannot securely label them under hydraulics or oceanography or botany or metaphysics. At this point the preservation of what I have called the historical memory seems involved with the current articulation of the world of learning, an articulation ever more minutely intricate according as, in Cox's sardonic words, more and more of our sciences "are both more exact and more uncertain." Each of us may be remembered *in our discipline*; woe, and in the worst cases oblivion, attend those who have no one discipline, or have one that they stray outside of; who detect what Upward was to call, and after him Pound, "rhymes" between disciplines—something more than analogies, yet less than equivalences.

And yet if we ask why Upward was ignored in his lifetime and has been largely ignored since, it will hardly do to suppose this was because his synthesizing intelligence flew in the face of a strong professional determination to compartmentalize. For there were other synthesizing popular educators—H. G. Wells has been mentioned—who in Upward's day received sufficient acclaim. G. K. Chesterton might be another instance. Yet if it isn't the intellectual climate that must bear the blame, on the other hand, as Michael Sheldon says, "it seems clear that the practical factors alone are not sufficient to explain the obscurity surrounding his life and works." By the time of *The Divine Mystery,* Upward was arguing that in all human cultures, including quite notably Christendom, the genius is doomed to the role of changeling and sacrificial scapegoat. And "genius" was surely, and rightly, how he characterized himself. Accordingly some have suggested that his suicide eleven years later was the logical outcome. But a man does not shoot himself to prove the rightness of a theory. Years before, Upward had advanced a much more mundane but more plausible explanation of why he was, as increasingly we must think he was, vindictively overlooked:

> The reputation, and even the livelihood, of a private man of letters is largely at the mercy of great organs of opinion like *The Daily News*; their grudges are often lasting, and they have the means of keeping up a vendetta long after the public has forgotten its origin; and the law of England does not afford that protection to assailed individuals which is afforded by the law of other countries, by requiring the signature of newspaper articles and the insertion of replies. In these circumstances I can only place myself in the hands of the public, and trust to its sense of fair play to protect me in the discharge of my duty to itself and to those who have appealed to it through me.

This is from *The East End of Europe* (1908), one of Upward's books that is nowadays little read and indeed seldom to be found. I have seen it

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described as "a travel-book" and also as "a war-correspondent's dispatches." Neither description is accurate. Better is the subtitle: "The Report of an Unofficial Mission to the European Provinces of Turkey on the Eve of the Revolution." The Revolution meant is the bloodless one of the Young Turks in 1908 against Abdul Hamid II. At once we see why *The East End of Europe* can never attract even such few readers as have lately been brought to *The Divine Mystery* (not to speak of *The New Word*, shamefully never reprinted to this day): where those books sail at a high and intoxicating level of abstraction, *The East End of Europe* is unremittingly concerned with the quotidian and the contingent—in a setting, moreover, the Balkan peninsula in the first decade of this century, than which few can seem more remote from the modern common reader's interests or frame of reference. And yet, whatever Upward may have distorted or suppressed (for instance, his mission was unofficial—who then financed it, and in whose interests?), *The East End of Europe* gives to his thought an extra dimension that we should not have dreamed of, after reading only *The Divine Mystery* and *The New Word*.

Here is Upward the historian; and in fact the first fifty pages of *The East End of Europe* are masterly in their concise clarity, making manageable sense of a conflict of languages and races so traditionally intractable that it has generated the baleful word *Balkanization*. As a traveler Upward is humorous and relaxed, urbane; and towards the schoolchildren whom he meets in their classrooms—Turkish, Greek, Bulgarian, and of mixed races—he is tender. Hardly ever does he fall back on that staple of travelers' tales—the lousiness or other disadvantages of his accommodation. And he eschews altogether, drawing attention to it himself, impressions of landscape; his concern is entirely with the inhabitants of those landscapes, and from that, their human and civic condition day by day, nothing is allowed to distract him. We get another surprising shaft of light onto him when he concludes his castigation of an English journalist who had preceded him: "I confess myself unable to understand how any writer could have imagined that he could help his argument by including such passages as those in a book intended to be read by English gentlemen." Was "English gentlemen" written straight-faced or with tongue in cheek? Kenneth Cox seems to be right when he says that "irony was not one of Upward's weapons"; and so I infer that, disconcerting as it may be for modern readers, Upward's appeal to English gentlemen was made in all naïve sincerity.

Again, we may feel, Upward was extraordinarily ill-advised, or else unlucky, or else perverse. For who in seventy or eighty years has cared what "Rumelia" is, or was? It was what Upward chose to travel over, and to report on: that large Balkan territory which, as the Ottoman Empire

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found ever less energy to administer it, was becoming a power vacuum. Into that vacuum were rushing Bulgar, Serb and Greek, Rumanian and Albanian, each of them more or less manipulated by one of the Great Powers: Russia and Austria, Britain and France and Italy, covertly but effectively Germany—the powers which had created the vacuum in the first place, by harassing and humiliating the retreating Turk, under the seldom enunciated but always understood pretext of defending Christendom against Islam.

Upward presents the principal power struggle in the region as between Bulgar and Greek. He declares himself, firmly and indeed fervently, Hellenophile. Armed bands both Bulgarian and Greek were roaming the territory; and Upward claims to have found that the Greek bands were defensive and protective vigilantes, whereas the Bulgarian bands *(comitadji)*, directly organized from Sofia, were "Bulgarizing" by terror. More surprisingly, he is strongly pro-Turk; at least, in one anecdote after another, he presents the Ottoman administration as thoroughly mild and humane, the Pashas' rule over their Christian subjects as by and large enlightened. Indeed, a strong undertow in the book, which we become more aware of the further we read, is that, whereas the Christian communities are murderous towards each other, the Mohammedan is evenhandedly compliant and considerate towards all of them. The cumulative effect is almost Swiftian. It challenges at every point the originally Gladstonian consensus that had for many years governed British policy on "the Eastern question":

> In our nurseries, if a child shows a boisterous and ungovernable disposition, we call him a "young Turk." A favourite figure in our nursery tales is that of the terrible Turk, with his big turban, and big beard, and baggy trousers, his curly moustache, curly slippers, and curly scimitar. The redoubtable Bluebeard, according to historians, was actually a French or Breton noble; but he is always pictured as a Turk. Such ideas, so early implanted, are never really effaced.
>
> For a hundred years past those Powers which hope to aggrandize themselves at the expense of Turkey, and those aspiring peoples which have desired foreign aid in overthrowing their old conquerors, have deluged Europe with denunciations of the Turk. The cause of Christianity, the cause of liberty, and the cause of territorial greed have found a common enemy in the Turk. In the year 1876 two of these causes found a champion in the most powerful popular orator since Demosthenes.
>
> Gladstone, a name which I have never heard mentioned by any Turk except in terms of sincere respect, had two supreme interests at heart—what he believed to be Christianity, and what he believed to be freedom. On many occasions in his life one of these interests pleaded against the other. Over the question of Bulgaria the two were united, and the result was tremendous.
>
> The great statesman then at the helm of the British empire trimmed his sails to the wind, and brought the ship into port. What was genuinely Bulgarian territory

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was rendered independent; but the ambitions of Russia were repressed, Turkey was safeguarded, and the future was left open for Greece.

This result could not satisfy Gladstone. The General Election of 1880 was one of the few ever fought in England on a question of foreign politics, and it resulted in an overwhelming condemnation of the Turk for the "Bulgarian atrocities"—a strangely prophetic phrase!

That decision of the electorate was loyally accepted by the followers of Beaconsfield, and their new leader afterwards emulated Gladstone in his language about Turkey and her sovereign.

"Bulgarian atrocities" is said to be "a strangely prophetic phrase" because, whereas Gladstone meant by it atrocities allegedly committed by Turks in Bulgaria, Upward means by it atrocities that he alleges the Bulgarians have committed in Macedonia.

What is remarkable here is that, in his several fruitless attempts to enter parliamentary politics (Michael Sheldon gives us such details as we have), Upward himself seems to have campaigned on what we might now call the left wing of Gladstonian liberalism. Accordingly it may seem that in *The East End of Europe* we encounter, in the field of politics, what Kenneth Cox laboriously but valuably defines as a characteristic habit of Upward's mind:

Upward had the kind of mind which, proceeding from a central sense of an ungraspable whole, what he called the "All-thing," advances to an outpost of opinion only to find itself associated with persons who have arrived there by some process of ratiocination, or who have stationed themselves there for motives of self-interest, and which thereupon retires to its centre, refreshes itself at its source and advances again in a different direction, sometimes to a position diametrically opposite to the first. His writing continually takes up new starting points, working round his main preoccupations, but breaking off before a definite conclusion can be identified and fixed.

It is rather important to see what Cox is here claiming for Upward. He is not saying that Upward "couldn't make up his mind"—which is an incapacity that, where we have encountered it, none of us is called on to condone. He isn't saying, either, that Upward rather often changed his mind and consistently claimed his right to do so—though that's a right that we ought to recognize, as much in intellectual endeavor as in politics, though we seldom do. Nor is Kenneth Cox, as I understand him, advancing a claim for "the free play of mind," where "free" means "irresponsible." Rather, if I read him right, he is making a plea for the provisional: that is to say, for assertions which, however trenchantly made (and why assert at all, if not trenchantly?), are corrigible in the light of further evidence, even of further reflection and extraneous

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opinion. What Cox is standing up for in fact, with Upward as prime instance, is the rights of the *speculative* intelligence.

That intelligence cannot be, in political or any other terms, partisan. And so politics, because it is of its nature partisan, cannot make use of, because it cannot trust, an intelligence like Upward's. The English electors were right therefore to deny Upward a parliamentary seat, whenever he asked for it. However there are intelligences (many more of them, indeed) that are at once keen and partisan. Such was Henry Noel Brailsford (1873–1958), the English journalist whose *Macedonia* had appeared in 1906, whom Upward girds at on page after page, and in footnote after footnote, of *The East End of Europe*; of whose retaliation in the *Daily News* Upward admits himself afraid. It would be worth someone's while to scan the columns of the *Daily News* through the relevant years to see if Upward's fears of retaliation were or were not well-founded. What is certain is that Brailsford went on to have a career, as opinion-maker, that is abundantly and even deferentially recorded; his books are still remembered, and (some of them) reprinted. Brailsford's principal publications are: *The Broom of the War-God* (a novel, 1898); *Shelley, Godwin and Their Circle* (1913); *The War of Steel and Gold* (1914); *Belgium and the Scrap of Paper* (1915); *A League of Nations* (1917); *The Russian Workers' Republic* (1921); *Socialism for Today* (1925); *How the Soviets Work* (1928); *Property or Peace?* (1934); *Voltaire* (1935); *Rebel India* (1931); and *Subject India* (1943). He earned a long and respectful entry in *The Twentieth Century Dictionary of National Biography,* from which Upward's name is, alas not conspicuously, absent.

And yet, for as long as Upward was alive, his career and Brailsford's seemed to run in parallel—with this difference: that Brailsford was consistent. Brailsford was, from first to last, a left-wing thinker; and though, like all such in his lifetime, he had to make tactical adjustments from time to time (now ardent about communist Russia, now keeping his distance from it), his bent is, whatever the subject he takes up, predictable. That surely is what we mean when we characterize such consistency as "admirable": we mean that on any given question we can be certain, within manageable limits, which way Brailsford will jump. There never was any such certainty about Upward. And to be radically unpredictable scares everybody—in the world of learning, as in other worlds.

A good case in point is Upward's attitude toward the Irish. Born in Worcester to a family attached to the Plymouth Brethren, Upward attended and graduated from the Royal University of Ireland, an institution particularly intended—largely on J. H. Newman's initiative—for Irish Roman Catholics. Why his alma mater should have been thus

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unlikely, not to say outlandish, is what no one offers to explain, unless he explains it himself in his pseudonymous autobiography, *Some Personalities* (1921), which I have not seen. (Robert Duncan, who has, did not trust it very far.) This is in itself an instance of how Upward, in his life as in his thinking, not so much eludes all categories as confounds them. We cannot even, in our ignorance of circumstances now probably irrecoverable, label the choice "quixotic." However that may be, it seems that Upward in his Irish years aligned himself, quite actively too, with certain Irish nationalists. Yet in *The East End of Europe* when Upward alludes to the Irish, as he does several times, his sympathies seem to lie quite elsewhere. Brailsford had argued, in support of the *comitadji*, that "a revolutionary organisation has as much right as a recognised Government to punish traitors, and to levy taxes by force." In one who was or would shortly be in touch with Lenin, the sentiment is not surprising. But Upward is appalled:

> The Bulgarian apologist can only excuse the atrocities of his clients by arguments which would be rejected with horror by the ordinary anarchist. According to him, if in any country a body of men, however contemptible in point of numbers, band themselves together to seize the government, they are thereby justified, not merely in employing assassination against the agents and supporters of the government in existence; they are justified in usurping authority over the ordinary peaceable inhabitants; they may rob and plunder them, they may murder those who complain, or torture those who hang back.
>
> If the anarchists of Europe should ever be tempted to act upon these principles, the world will become one great carnival of horror. And if anything could add to their wickedness it would be their extension to what is, in substance, a war of annexation waged, not against the Turkish Government, but against the Hellenist people. In order to understand the full bearing of this frightful reasoning, we must imagine Ireland an independent republic, and emissaries from Dublin landing in Liverpool to conquer that city. They will be received and sheltered in the Irish quarter; they will shirk encounters with the English police; but they will set about bringing over the Welsh citizens to their side by a campaign of savage terror.

There is no denying that this reads very quaintly in 1989. Has the I.R.A. in fact missed a trick by not terrorizing Welsh citizens of Liverpool? It is surely a comical notion. Yet Upward's only mistake was to pick on the wrong city; read "Belfast" for "Liverpool," and "Unionist" for "Welsh citizens," and his analogy not only holds up, it is an accurate prediction. Moreover, in the areas which it controls, the I.R.A., like other terrorist organizations, assumes just those "rights" that Brailsford asserts on behalf of his Bulgarians, acting in this on thoroughly Leninist principles. Should we react to Upward's "one great carnival of horror" by exclaim-

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ing, *o sancta simplicitas*? Or should we not give him credit for foreseeing, however incredulously, what has in fact come to pass since he died?

We may wonder, it seems we *ought* to wonder, whether Upward was not "blacked out" quite deliberately, for political reasons, by thinkers in the Leninist tradition of the Fabian Society, powerful in British public and intellectual life from Wells and Shaw and the youthful Brailsford through to Kingsley Martin, who wrote the hagiography of Brailsford for *The Twentieth Century D.N.B.* For of course even today to be, like Brailsford, an apologist for political terror is not held in Britain to disqualify anyone from esteem among the intellectual *élite*, nor even from public office. And yet to speculate along these lines is unthinkable. For to entertain such speculations is to subscribe in some measure to "the conspiracy theory of history." And that is unthinkable, because Ezra Pound is unavoidably part of the story, and once Pound is named we are in sight of such a monstrous product of conspiracy theory as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Yet most of us have seen in our own spheres of interest, including the world of learning, that plots *are* hatched, exclusions and blackballings *are* engineered, vendettas *are* maintained; that some persons who think themselves discriminated against are right to think so. The initiators of pogroms, up to and including the Nazi genocide, are still triumphing in our midst if, by their cynical manipulation of conspiracy theory, they blackmail us into refusing to acknowledge that in some circles and at some stages of recorded history conspiracies against certain individuals were hatched, were maintained, and were successful—to the point where, in the worst cases, the targeted individual was virtually written out of the historical record altogether.

Moreover, the world of professional scholarship cannot escape its share of the blame. For there is professional pride on the part of historians. Intellectual historians, like other kinds, have come to think it ignominious for them, even part of their time, to go about stooping to keyholes and listening at half-open doors or to backstairs gossip—which is what they are condemned to, if they accept that conspiracies sometimes happen. Where in such furtive researches are to be found the wide vistas, the uncoverings of dynamisms and laws operating through many eras, such as historians have felt themselves called to since Hegel if not before? For a not unreasonably ambitious historian, the trouble with a case like Upward's is that it is stubbornly particular. There is no law of history that he exemplifies, no generalization however modest or tentative that can be drawn from his life, so far as we know it. There is no way in which to make him representative. The late poet Robert Duncan, introducing the Californian reprint of *The Divine Mystery*, thought he could see one way in which Upward in his generation was a representative case:

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> Allen Upward has to contend with . . . the gap that was beginning to appear between popularizing journalism and the high styles of personal expression, as he has to contend with his lower class Plymouth origins and his Grammar School Education, with his Grub Street ambitions and his job writing, with his careers in civil service, in an England where class consciousness and a literary elitism growing out of Oxford and Cambridge associations made for his cultural isolation.

Thus Duncan (though it's way off his main concern) finds a category that Upward can be slotted into: he was "born the wrong side of the tracks." But it won't do. Upward lived in fact through a period when crossing from the wrong side of the tracks to the right side was, for persons of talent, comparatively easy and could be very profitable. Again, though many cases could be cited (Wells, Chesterton, Shaw), the best counter-example is Brailsford who, born ten years after Upward to a provincially nonconformist background like his, survived to write books still acclaimed as "minor classic" or "socialist classic." Even Brailsford's university, Glasgow, was neither more nor less provincial than the Royal University of Ireland, neither more nor less remote from "Oxford and Cambridge associations." Why then is Brailsford remembered and Upward not? It seems that the social historian's safety net is as little as any other able to catch Upward; he falls through it, plummet-like, as certainly as through any other of the nets that scholars have woven, of ever finer mesh, to ensure that the memorable is remembered. It doesn't happen; a maverick like Allen Upward is only very partially, and by accident, rescued from oblivion.

Kenneth Cox decided that Upward is best described as "a visionary." But that is the merest device, even (one might say) a cop-out. "Visionary" is a catch-all category devised to accommodate those—Swedenborg, Nietzsche, Upward (other names will come to mind)—whom none of the properly constituted committees and sub-committees will take on. It is good that such a category exists, to stop the committees and sub-committees from thinking that between them they have taken account of the entire range of intellectual endeavor. All the same, a cop-out is what it is. The sort of thinking that we agree to call "visionary" is, where it is not self-deluding and charlatan, a sort of thinking that the currently accepted map of human thought cannot, any more than earlier now discredited maps, find room for. But just suppose that this were a primal kind of thinking which secondary kinds, theology as much as philology or physics, can batten on. In that case its exclusion from the array or hierarchy of accredited disciplines would still be justified. And the sacrificial victimization of its exponents would be understandable, indeed almost a matter of course. But that would bear out Upward's thesis that the truly original thinker is at once scapegrace and scapegoat.

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It is a thesis that his own life and subsequent reputation may be thought to bear out, in a quite spectacular or exemplary fashion. Brailsford of course posed no such problems.

Upward died unmarried and childless. He fathered no spiritual children either, unless we count a maverick and half-crazy American poet. Whom therefore does it help, to have his teasing obscurity worried over? The history of the modern mind is complete enough without him. Those of us who feel a little worry and a little shame on this score must be, whether we know it or not, appealing to a principle metaphysical if not religious: the *lacuna* impugns our dignity and the dignity of the intellectual pursuit we conceive ourselves to be engaged in. That is an irrational conviction: metaphysical, at best speculative. Keeping the historical record full, or as full as possible, the keeping of faith with past generations—these tasks, which we tend to think of as obvious and practical necessities, are nothing of the sort. They rest, whether we know it or not, on somewhere an act of faith.

Robert Penn Warren

1905–1989

Member, **THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR** ***Editorial Board***

1961–1964

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Painting with My Daughter

ANN HOSTETLER

We wet the dry discs,
soak the brushes in ultratones—
royal blue,
magenta, aquamarine—
wisps of brush stroking
mark the thick paper,
the silence,
faint inrush of breath
when the world runs together
making volcanoes of color
in the early shadows
of November afternoon.

After we finish
I stand before the window
flushing out the pigments
at the kitchen sink,
red and blue bleeding from the brushes
into the stream of clear water.
I hear her singing to herself
in the next room,
already caught up
in something new.

I do not turn on the light
but stand as shadow thickens
objects around me,
the window before me a square of fading light,
framing bare branches,
a frozen garden,
the cracked blue plastic swimming pool
from last summer.

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Bernard Malamud in Oregon

SUZANNE CLARK

BERNARD MALAMUD WAS A MEMBER of the English department at Oregon State University (then College) from 1949 to 1961. Weeks after he left Corvallis, Oregon, his novel *A New Life* was published, with its setting a college in a place in the Northwest called "Cascadia."

Some readers (not only easterners) have assumed that Malamud must have found the little western community of Corvallis stultifying and taken his revenge in his book. This is not, however, what those who knew him thought. He lived in Corvallis for twelve years, during which he made his reputation and discovered lifelong friends; and he had returned to Corvallis with his family to visit. Was Malamud like his hero in *A New Life*, Sy Levin—marginal, a stranger in the West, with the moral isolation of the teacher who cares about ideas and the liberal arts? What about the family man, father of two children, who bought a house across the street from their school?

The always difficult relationship between biography and the novel is especially mysterious in Malamud's case because he so vigorously resisted the biographical. Little has been written about his life; but he generally refused to explore his past, except through the medium of fiction. *A New Life* draws from Malamud's experience at Oregon State in complex ways, allowing one to explore the narratives of life and art, and the kinds of transformations Malamud worked on the material he found.

Bernard Malamud and Oregon State University have had a significant influence on each other. The Oregon State English department has maintained strong ties with Malamud and his family all these years, and faculty members have not only vivid memories of the past but still-current friendships with his family. A number of these former colleagues, friends, and students are still living in Corvallis. Their recollections of Malamud help illuminate the problematic relationship between the novelist's life and his art.

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Malamud, his wife Ann, and his two-year-old son Paul arrived in Corvallis in 1949 when the English department was recruiting composition instructors to staff the positions that had been held largely by women during the war. Perhaps there was not much selectivity in his job hunting: he had sent out applications in large numbers, and Oregon State hired him as one of many new instructors. Though Malamud had long since established his own style, his writing was not then well known. Malamud's job application says: "I shall have my first novel, tentatively entitled *The Light Sleeper,* completed by the end of the year." He lists as publications short stories in *American Prefaces, Threshold, Assembly,* and the *Washington Post*; book reviews for the *New York Times Sunday Book Review, Atlantic Monthly,* and *Tomorrow*; and free-lance radio scripts for "Bulldog Drummond." The publications probably did not greatly interest Sigurd Peterson, then department head, and even when the novel was finally published, it did not bring Malamud a promotion. Peterson wanted an efficiently run composition program, without literary intrusions, and if he read carefully, he probably was not impressed by Malamud's closing statement: "I should like very much to teach in a college or university which encourages creative work among members of its faculty."

But Malamud's disciplined commitment to writing impressed others in Oregon from the beginning. As he met colleagues in Corvallis, Malamud talked seriously about what he called "my stories." Faith Norris remembers his telling about the outline of a novel he was writing (which turned out to be *The Natural)* at a party soon after he arrived. In general, Malamud was reluctant to talk about his work while he was composing, but eager to hear what readers thought once he had finished. He gave his friends stories to read, cared very much about their responses, and read *The Natural* before it was published to his night class in creative writing.

The tough will to write disciplined and coerced Malamud's life. Edward Smith met him when he was newly arrived, on faculty day of his first year, walking across campus to a meeting. Malamud asked a question that bothered Smith very much: How much time would his teaching duties require? Smith's first impression was of "an Eastern slicker here to devote a minimum of time to proper work." But, Smith says, he soon found out it was instead "the attempt of a disciplined person to evaluate his new position."

In *A New Life,* Sy Levin, "formerly a drunkard," arrives in the little college town of Easchester "bearded, fatigued, lonely." Levin remains the outsider to the end. Malamud had a more genial experience. He arrived in Corvallis not alone but with his wife, Ann, and his young son Paul after a series of anxious letters to the department head about

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apartments, furniture, and other arrangements. The family rented a house next to Charles and Elsie Ross, who also had a little boy. The Malamuds—New Yorkers—had no car and did not drive. Elsie Ross remembers getting together with Ann Malamud to go shopping, and Hildred Rice soon volunteered to drive the Malamuds to the coast, for she always welcomed newcomers. In a few years—that is, by 1952—the Malamuds had a daughter, Janna. Their friends Chester and Louise Garrison moved next door, and there was much visiting back and forth. The Malamuds bought a house, put new wallpaper over the fireplace, and the neighborhood kids played with Janna and Paul in a secret room in the attic. This is not to say that the Malamuds adopted all of the local Corvallis ways. Malamud thought of himself as a writer, not a gardener, so he got someone else to do the lawn. Faculty wives and women found Ann Malamud warm and outgoing and interested in people: Elsie Ross still sends her clippings from the newspaper. Corvallis was then, as it remains now, a family town: its way of life opened a place for Malamud as a family man.

Malamud walked the five or six blocks to the university every morning, often with Chester Garrison. Later his routine intersected the morning route of Rod Waldron, the librarian, who eventually bought Malamud's house. Some days they talked companionably; other days—if Malamud had something he was composing in mind—they walked together in silence.

Malamud's character Levin in *A New Life* seems almost alone in opposing the golf-playing bonhomie he finds in the English department. His opposition represents an attitude shared by many of the "outsiders" in Corvallis who made friends with one another and formed the social group that included the Malamuds. Faculty in most small university towns form a more cosmopolitan community than is found on Main Street and are oriented more to international perspectives, caring usually as they do about the arts. In Corvallis, this liberal community was small, perhaps closer as a result, and sometimes it felt at odds with the largely conservative townspeople. As a land-grant school, the college had strong regional connections and saw its chief educational mission as service to a predominantly agrarian society. The split between town and gown extended into the university, with large numbers of the faculty coming from the local area, maintaining regional perspectives and friendships. J. W. Groshong, who was Malamud's office mate and probably the model for the character "Bucket" in *A New Life*, had a Ph.D. from Stanford, but he, like Ed Smith, had grown up in Corvallis, and he never asked the Malamuds to his home. It never entered his mind, he says, and not until he read *A New Life* did he ever think that Malamud would have cared to be invited.

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The Malamuds were part of a large group of well-educated friends—artists, musicians, scientists, as well as English faculty—who got together to talk, for dinners, for parties after foreign films and lectures. The Garrisons and the Norrises were part of the group. So was R. D. Brown, now an author of detective fiction, the artist Nelson Sandgren, and Malamud's physician, Lew Krakauer. They didn't play golf or play bridge; they were more interested in talking about literature or current events. Sensitive to the isolation felt by newcomers, many of this group regularly invited new faculty members to their homes. The Malamuds asked the Garrisons to dinner by October of the year the Garrisons arrived, and that is how the friendship started. In the last year they were in Corvallis, when Malamud's reputation had grown to be the chief fame of the English department, he and Ann were still inviting new faculty to dinner, still worrying over the lives and careers of the young Levin-like instructors.

By 1961, when Malamud left Corvallis, a number of the "young Turks" at Oregon State were excited about writing, literature, and teaching the liberal arts. Malamud encouraged the new instructors to take themselves seriously and also encouraged their rebellion against the older regime. Many of them saw *A New Life*, in fact, as a manifesto in favor of their cause. Malamud had once come to the defense of an instructor who was nearly fired, and he also helped with careers when he could.

The poet John Haislip was at Oregon State then and remembers his first poetry reading. At the party afterward, Malamud passed on a compliment, and then he "took me aside in the hallway away from the party and he used his finger and looked me in the eye, and he said: 'Now, I'm going to give you some advice. Number one, never read anybody else's stuff if it's your reading. Number two, don't shrug your shoulders after the poem because that looks like you don't care. And third, don't read too fast.' "

What effect did the isolation of the West have on Malamud's career as a writer? Nelson Sandgren used to talk with him about their shared experience of growing up in a city—Sandgren in Chicago, Malamud in Brooklyn. Malamud told how he established himself in the neighborhood as a storyteller when he was growing up in New York. Both Malamud and Sandgren were interested in those early years and thought they were extremely important for the artist's development. Sandgren believes that Oregon is a place where it might be easier to connect with those adolescent experiences, to do the memory work, where other distractions do not interfere so much with the reminiscence necessary to art. It seems quite possible that the distance from New York and the perspective of Oregon helped Malamud write *The Assistant*. Perhaps

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the very limitations of the English department then were also helpful in a way.

After World War II, young writers in America were more than ever before forced to confront the separation of art and life—the vast distance between the awful reality of the holocaust of history and the academic specialization of writing—what John Aldridge has called, in sum, the "dangers of the university." These included the artificiality of the university environment, the repression of experiment and risky experience, the tendency to self-consciousness or to premature publication, and, above all, the dominance of criticism. The challenge to young novelists came at least in part from the "new criticism," whose formalism preferred poetry to fiction and insisted that questions of art did not depend on questions of reality, especially not the "realities" produced by history.

Malamud's work has often seemed to defy these academic pressures and to continue the older traditions of story, fantasy, and myth. With Malamud's death in 1986 came the beginning of a reevaluation of his place in literary history, which has already begun suggesting that he practiced a more complex art than heretofore assumed. What has made Malamud's work seem traditional remains salient—perhaps above all a sense of moral conviction and distress, which is connected to his representation of Jewish experience but not identical to it.

Oregon State University is a place where Malamud escaped, like his character Levin, not only from the old failures and struggles of the city life but also (unlike Levin) the critical oppression of other university environments. He escaped the postwar malaise of the urban academic only to rediscover American provincialism. Yet Malamud stayed, writing and teaching, for twelve years, and made his reputation. Ten years after he arrived, unknown, he was the one man in Oregon that C. P. Snow wanted to see when he came to the state on tour.

Malamud's own journey as a writer from the East followed an archetypal pattern in the history of the West, with Oregon State University providing in this case the role of the Arcadian fields. It was a pattern Malamud used in *A New Life*. He himself talked about it in a lecture at Oregon State in 1967 as part of the larger American mythology of East and West, with his novel's hero Sy Levin, only one of many, the stranger, the easterner, who comes to the West seeking a better life and leaving his mark. In *A New Life*, the West seems Edenic, a place of possible rebirth, its forest a scene promoting the realization of desire.

But in *A New Life* there are no humanities majors in "Cascadia," and, as Levin says to the director of composition, "The liberal arts—as you know—since ancient times—have affirmed our rights and liberties. . . . Democracy owes its existence to the liberal arts." Whether the novel's

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conclusion is read as a happy ending or an ironic entry into the fallen world of experience, Levin, the hero, drives off with his love Pauline and leaves behind a college that has been forced to confront the desire for intellectual freedom as well as Levin's adulterous desire for the chairman's wife. Although *A New Life* is technically what is known as an "academic novel," by connecting the problems of a particular college situation to the larger themes of American westering, Malamud's novel about teaching offers the contradictory figure of the teacher who is at once victim and hero of his own moral desire.

When John Barth came to give a reading at Oregon State University in 1987, he looked at the picture of Malamud on the wall in the English department's student lounge and said he felt moved to see him there. "Malamud means teacher, you know," Barth said. Malamud was impatient with the vocational, skill-oriented view of teaching writing that he found at Oregon State, partly because he cared very much about guiding the young. "I do not think of Freshman composition as a course in writing only. . . . Understanding the ideal is the beginning of its use," Malamud wrote in a section of his application for employment titled "Ideas on Teaching Freshman Composition in College."

But Sy Levin, his teacher as fictional Everyman, has a complicated relationship to Malamud's own life as a teacher. The experience of the English department at Oregon State, as Malamud drew on it in his novel for details, was true enough to the facts of teaching everywhere that he received letters from other places after *A New Life* was published, saying how closely he had captured their situation.

The conditions under which Malamud worked may sound grim, but they will not sound unfamiliar to many high school and community college teachers right now: no literature in composition classes, a department objective exam, a required number of themes, an administration that viewed composition as a vocational skill, stating, "We're not here to teach students to think; we're here to teach them to write." Although Malamud's teaching load was heavy and he was not allowed to teach literature because he had no Ph.D., teaching itself was something Malamud cared about.

Coming from his previous post, teaching nights at Erasmus High School, Bernard Malamud may have felt very much like Sy Levin about his classes: "Teaching itself was sanctuary—to be enclosed in a warm four-walled classroom. Levin taught twelve hours a week, a thankful reduction of the more than twenty of his high school program." On the other hand, Sy Levin fears that he is not teaching well because he is too hard on the students: "He lectured his students for the thinness of their themes, for their pleasant good-natured selves without a critical attitude to life. Then he was conscience-stricken for not patiently teaching."

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Malamud's former students at Oregon State report similar lectures from him, passionate pleas for commitment that they heard as concern more than impatience. Some of Malamud's colleagues and friends thought his style was somewhat harsh with young students as well, perhaps for the same reasons. Chester Garrison has remarked that student themes were indeed "bland" and the students "terribly provincial." Garrison, an easterner himself, told me that the insistent niceness of students was one of the shocking cultural differences he found when he came to Oregon.

Malamud was very successful with the students he had in adult evening creative writing classes, urging them to publish their work. The young or the uncertain students in his freshman classes brought out his sympathetic attention. But he may well have had crises of patience with his advanced composition students. A former student writes, "From a typical Bernard Malamud lecture, young middle-class freshmen at a state school would soon start to learn more about their lack of sophistication, about the benefits of a liberal arts education and more about the misplaced emphasis that our technical curricula had on 'getting a job.' "

Malamud has so vividly portrayed the sweatshop conditions under which the composition instructor labored that it is hard to believe he could be so productive at Oregon State or want to stay so long. One of the reasons for his success must have to do with his legendary self-discipline. He taught the twelve hours of composition classes each week, graded papers, conferred with students—but on an unyielding schedule. Monday, Wednesday, Friday were for teaching. The other four days of the week were for writing. So merciless was he about his use of time that stories grew up around him. Someone circulated the rumor—not J. W. Groshong, though he is glad to pass along the joke—that Malamud had told his wife Ann that she was not to have their second child on one of his writing days. Edward Smith has written:

> In his first years here we still had the infamous theme room where we had to file student compositions after they had been graded and revised. A bureaucratic administration wanted to make sure we had assigned, read, properly marked, and had revised the required number of student themes. Of course Bern's themes were always all on file a week or two before term end, and he could thus walk up and down the halls, poking his head into our offices asking if we were still reading papers and assuring us his had been filed long since.

This absolute self-discipline he regarded as perhaps obsessive, but also as moral. Ed Smith later drew on Malamud's example in order to discipline himself into finishing his Ph.D. dissertation. When Smith told him so in a letter, Malamud wrote to him: "I am trying to indicate gratitude and admiration; gratitude that my example—exclusive of obsession—should mean something to you; and admiration for completing that arduous task, the enterprise becoming a moral act."

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When Malamud arrived in 1949, the college was eager to add instructors to its staff. One of his former colleagues says that the administration wanted to change the female-dominated character of the instructor staff, but that if it had been known that Malamud was Jewish, he might not have been hired. Nevertheless, even though the state of Oregon still, like many states, has instances of anti-Semitism at times, Corvallis was less overtly anti-Semitic than parts of the East. In *A New Life*, Malamud's Jewishness seems submerged in the more general issue of cultural strangeness. For twelve years Malamud confronted the provincialism of Oregon with the provincialism of New York, and the encounter provided a place where his own imagination would create its characteristic shape in his fictional world. The conjunction of Oregon and the streets of New York in Malamud's mind most probably occurred around the competing versions of social irony and humility in the two cultures. Both could have contributed to the figure of a victim in Malamud's imagination. The eastern victim sacrifices himself spectacularly out West, in confrontations that violate all the western codes of niceness. But the westerner, the Oregonian, is willing above all to accept criticism, to blame self, to be humble of aspiration, not to ask much.

J. W. Groshong, a third-generation Oregonian, told me that "Bern and I, in this office together, were, in a way, farther apart than the three thousand geographical miles that separated us." Groshong is the office mate Malamud quotes as saying he wished he had been born a Jew. Groshong says Malamud took *him* too literally, however. "I found that my life had not equipped me with a sense of conflict, whereas the Jew has an ethnic history of conflict on the grandest of scales." That sense of history, of conflict, of the critical voice, is what Malamud brought to Oregon. But perhaps it was an eternal return of the same, a voice from without that found its recurring agreement from within.

When Malamud arrived at Oregon State on the eve of the fifties and of McCarthyism, a volatile Irishman had just left the department after trying to make reforms, and a professor in a science department had been fired for his politics. Malamud himself was viewed as a kind of trouble-maker—Garrison approvingly calls him a "malcontent"—one who would say what he thought, who would always go down to the chairman's office with anything he found wrong, who was decidedly not "nice," and one, in fact, who was responsible for saving the jobs and promotions of some of his colleagues because of the battles he fought. The year before he left he went to battle for a young poet fired for leading a protest march (the poet was eventually reinstated).

But Malamud was not alone at Oregon State in his liberalism. Others preceded him, followed him, agreed with him. The English faculty was not composed of country bumpkins, and the cultured easterner was no

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utter stranger. Chester Garrison, for instance, who arrived shortly after Malamud, was a Dartmouth man and had a Ph.D. from Columbia. Faith Norris, who had her Ph.D. from Berkeley, collaborated with Malamud on a children's book, *Kim of Korea*. By the time Malamud left the university, the younger members of the department were a rebellious crew, revolting against seeing English as a "service" department, who felt Malamud's sympathy with their cause and carried on the fight after he left. The embattled nature of the lower division of liberal arts could, in fact, have protected Malamud from being caught up in the kind of schisms between critics with Ph.D.'s and creative writers that existed at other institutions.

So Malamud's hero Levin is a composite crusader, archetypal, isolated as Malamud himself was not. The Oregon of Malamud's time was ready to endorse the voice of conscience, of reform, at the same time that Corvallis was small-town "conservative." Wayne Morse was a U.S. senator, and two months before Malamud arrived, Dick Neuberger, then a state senator, had published in the *New York Times Magazine* an article criticizing Oregon's rural voters for their "suspicion of the city." In *A New Life* Levin represents not only the stranger from the East but also the voice of the critic, of the modern, which has always existed in Oregon in a dialectic with the rural. What was unfamiliar about Malamud was the extent of his genius, not his critical attitudes.

But it is only fair to say that Malamud did not fully understand what a land-grant school like Oregon State was about, and, furthermore, once he found out he was not sympathetic. One should recognize the rhetorical force of Malamud's novel: *A New Life* is a polemic in favor of the liberal arts. Malamud was in part responsible for perpetuating a myth about the loss of liberal arts. Under a bureaucratic allocation of instructional fields, Oregon State had some upper-division courses that were cut in the thirties, but it never had any liberal arts majors to lose until 1962. What J. W. Groshong pointed out very plainly to me was that Oregon State had a specific educational mission that it was carrying out very well indeed.

What Levin in *A New Life* wants to criticize about students at Cascadia College is the particular kind of provincialism suffered by a new world, a kind of Eden—the American theme—an unearned innocence:

> They showed almost no interest in the humanities and arts ("electives"). They overvalued "useful" knowledge and confused vocational training with humanistic education. They consistently applied standards of technical efficiency to the values and purposes of life; so did too many of their professors. Even their fears were unimaginative: not that civilization was imperiled and might be destroyed, but that if their grades were not high enough they would miss out on the "good

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jobs" and have to settle for a "lower standard of living." They were badly informed about themselves and the world. Their intelligence, their lives, were absorbed in triviality. They had lost much without knowing it. They had not earned their innocence.

In Oregon, the innocence of which Malamud wrote took, on closer inspection, the form of resistance to knowing.

If the shape of Oregon's provincialism is unearned innocence, imagine Malamud writing *A New Life* while he is teaching at Oregon State, insisting on trouble in Eden, writing as an act of exposure that will make it hard for him to stay on. In fact, when Jim Groshong pressed him that spring of 1961 before the novel came out and before he left Oregon State, he asked him, "What sort of inducement would get you to stay here?" Malamud said, "Well, that's a very interesting question." Then he said, "There is another reason why I can't stay here, and I can't tell you what it is." Malamud was estranging himself. That summer, before he left for Harvard, Malamud said, "Smith, when my book comes out this fall, be sure to tell the people I am *not* Sy Levin." He took David Gilbert aside and told him to remind everyone that the characters were composed, not real-life equivalents, but Gilbert thought a number of people were recognizable after he read the novel. When *A New Life* in fact was published in September, Malamud had already left Corvallis. Philip Roth, who has been what he calls "voyeuristic and indiscrete" himself in writing about Malamud, said in a *U.S. News and World Report* story in February of 1987:

> It's the things you don't even want to say to the people you trust that constitute a big portion of your real life. And I think fiction—at least my kind of fiction—is about that. . . . There is an act of self-removal writers are capable of that may look inhumane.

However, the criticisms in *A New Life* were not unspoken things. Malamud, and many others, had been saying them all along, out loud. Perhaps the act of producing a narrative history, rewriting colleagues as characters in the larger myth and self-removal from the familiar, caused discomfort. Annotated copies of the book circulated among certain faculty wives. There were shocked exchanges appearing in the letters to the editor of the Corvallis newspaper, the *Gazette-Times*, for several weeks after the book appeared. Some townspeople thought their suspicions confirmed about the loose sex life on campus. The head of the department, Herb Nelson, was very upset. Like the character Gilley in the book, he was a photography buff, and he was given to hiring staff by asking whether their pictures looked like they would fit in. Though he wanted to be friendly to everyone in the department, Nelson belonged

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to the older generation, whose values the book attacked. In spite of Malamud's statements that the characters were composites, Nelson took the portrayal personally. But his reaction was not representative. Six years later on a visit to Corvallis, Malamud reported himself still on good terms with Oregon State University—which had just offered him a much better job, he said, than the one he had left.

A New Life enters into literary history in unpredictable ways. Bob Frazier, who reviewed the novel for the *Eugene Register-Guard,* assumed it was an exposé of Oregon State. Speaking from the enclave of the University of Oregon, and obviously trying not to take advantage of a rival university he thinks is down, Frazier ventured that Malamud was "often unfair," the book written "with spite and almost without compassion." And, imagining a great deal of irritation up in Corvallis, he concluded, "If we are honest about it, the novel might bring some irritation, here in Eugene. It sometimes hits closer than 40 miles from home." But Frazier didn't fully understand the relationship of the novel or its author to Oregon State. He did not understand the character of Bernard Malamud, who was, above all, humane, author of innumerable acts of generosity reported by nearly everyone, and judged to be incapable of spite. The people who knew Malamud read the novel differently from Frazier. Malamud had always brought criticism to Oregon State—that much was nothing new. The criticism, in fact, was welcomed by many. And Corvallis was home, to him and to his family.

A few weeks after *A New Life* came out, Ed Smith wrote a three-page, single-spaced letter to Malamud, detailing the reactions of his colleagues. Smith wrote, "My feeling is that most of your former colleagues are intensely proud of your achievement and that you can expect above the obviously literary rewards coming your way the satisfaction of knowing that you have made possible improvement in the stature of your old department." And, later, "I am tickled with the reviews I've seen, Frazier's excepted." Members in the department quickly declared that it wouldn't be right to read the novel as a literal history, a theme repeated by Malamud's friends as well as his critics in the department. Jim Groshong, whom many suggest was the prototype for the character Bucket, wrote a review of the book for the *Corvallis Gazette-Times*. He wrote: "Like those whom he represents everywhere, Levin is almost by instinct the enemy of commercial morality and philistinism, especially when they masquerade as liberal education."

Still, the provincialism Malamud encountered also appeared as the populism of the West, a kind of ruthless insistence on democratic egalitarianism that made the liberal arts seem a difficult ideal. If Malamud's works are allegories of moral instruction, they revolve around the existential problems of life. Malamud's heroic victims only

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want "a better life," a little luck—small improvements in human existence, no more than everyone expected in the postwar "best years of our lives." But the modest desire seems to require heroic measures and to exact monstrous suffering. The ideal seems to mean that everyone, like Frank Alpine in *The Assistant*, must become a Jew, a metaphor for remembering what it is to be a victim.

Malamud liked to quote Jim Groshong, who once said he wished he had been born a Jew. When one thinks about the office of two teachers of composition in the wooden building under giant Douglas firs and compare that to the martyrdom of the hero of Malamud's novel *The Fixer*, who is locked in his cell, the fantasy of art seems to teach a much crueler lesson than the reality of the provinces. But another way to think about the complications of Malamud is to consider how he presses the comparatist perspective, a kind of internationalism of the mind. The America that forgets how it is insulated by the green lands is forced to remember that it is part of a human world with a painful past and a number of present victims. *A New Life* rewrites Oregon State in terms of larger histories of liberal thought; it gives us in Sy Levin a hero who resembles Malamud only enough to make autobiography into myth. For Levin is an anti-hero, a common man, and Malamud's personal story is unfashionably heroic.

In spite of such critics as Marvin Mudrick, who insisted in a television interview with Ed Smith that there was little distance between Malamud and his protagonist Levin, there is a considerable difference between the narratives of life and art. Malamud's life is another kind of story, less easy for us to believe, perhaps, than the comic failures and ironic victories of the Chaplinesque Sy Levin, or any of his other Everyman heroes, for that matter. Bernard Malamud, after all, lived his own life as a resounding success story, almost a sentimental one, about the rise of the immigrant shopkeeper's son, with the center of its trajectory taking place at Oregon State. During the twelve years of his stay, he published three novels and a collection of short stories, won a National Book Award, and established his reputation. When he arrived in 1949, an ex–high school teacher, he had published virtually nothing. He left in 1961 to teach at Harvard and subsequently to take his lifelong post at Bennington, where he taught, at his request, only every other term. What Malamud did not share with Sy Levin was his writing, and everything that went with that.

The desire of the writer for "the work of good writers," which he regarded as a moral issue, is the challenge that Malamud represented in his teaching life at Corvallis. The real Malamud and others around him were much more successful than his sacrificial hero Levin. Dreaming in vain of himself as department head, Levin states his hopes for the future:

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> What mightn't he achieve at Cascadia if he devoted himself to the task: a hundred needed reforms—raising the department from mediocrity to excellence. And while at that, who knows if, working every which way, he mightn't succeed in starting a campaign to bring back to Cascadia a liberal arts majors program? . . . One good thing led to another once somebody dared. Good institutions proliferate good deeds. They might, in town, build a concert hall and public forum, start an art gallery, theatre group, show foreign films, even open a bookstore that sold books.

What did Malamud achieve at Oregon State? He had campaigned for the liberal arts: he initiated a subscription concert series that continues to this day; with Chester Garrison, he started the foreign film series; he founded a faculty book review forum; he protested, like Levin, the censorship of texts, the special treatment of athletes, and the absence of literary models in the composition class. Malamud's willingness to protest, to confront, to be seen as a troublemaker—these suggest the recurring confrontation between a style that is eastern and the easygoing, agrarian West, where style is a matter of moral persuasion. Others shared his convictions about the importance of the liberal arts: majors appeared shortly after he left. In 1986, at Malamud's death, the English department held a memorial service and established a Malamud Scholarship program for promising young writers and dedicated "The Malamud Room" as a student lounge furnished with scholarly journals and reading material, including a display of publications by the now-productive English department.

Malamud's less-disciplined hero, Levin, came to Oregon and found Pauline. When Malamud reflected about what going to Oregon had meant in his career in a brief memoir called "Long Work, Short Life," first delivered at Bennington in 1985, he said: "I think I discovered the Far West and some subject matter of my earlier fiction at almost the same time, an interesting conjunction, in imagination, of Oregon and the streets of New York. One's fantasy goes for a walk and returns with a bride."

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The Thing Worth Saving

(in memory of Bruce Chatwin)

DAVID MASON

I had your postcard from the Volga River
and envied you the life of worn-out boots,
the way you exercised ideas by walking.
Pascal wrote, "Our nature lies in movement,"
but restlessness was more your realm than his.
What fine object, distilled or framed, collected,
cherished for its patina, would you have chosen
to keep? What voice, what face would finally
express the thing worth saving? I met you
waiting for a bus eight years ago in Greece,
one stop in an exhaustive string of places
keyed to the eccentric, to hate and love.

Starting from your grandmother's where you saw
the hide of mylodon inside a cabinet,
and Sotheby's, eyes darkened by appraisal,
you knew how damning our perfection is.
We are the ones who settle and destroy,
build and regret, wishing we could leave it,
wishing the code would signal our migration.
To get out of a car, thank the driver
and sling the moment's household on your back,
looking ahead at open roads and fields
no crows darken. . . .

Your life and lines are free,
your voice takes on the rhythm of your steps.

✪ DAVID MASON's work has been published in the *Sewanee Review*, *Cumberland Poetry Review*, and other magazines.

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The Great Persuader

A Memoir of My Father

MICHELLE BOBIER

MY FATHER HAS BEEN MUCH IN MY THOUGHTS LATELY. He always is, but more so at this time of year. As I write this, it is Christmastime, and it was in December of 1985 that Dad died. One of his brothers also died in December, many years ago, and his father died on Christmas day, not quite so many years ago; so in passing away at that time of year, Dad was, in a sense, following an unfortunate family tradition. "Passing away" is an inapt term for my father's dying. Passing away sounds like something gentle and soothing, an insensible change that comes by slow degrees, probably while one is asleep. Dad's death was both a struggle against the cancer that proved stronger than he was, and a fight to maintain the protective role he had always had toward us all. What he was trying to protect us from at the last was his own death.

Most of us, early in life, become intensely aware of our fathers in one way or another. We discover that we love them or hate them or are afraid of them or indifferent to them, or perhaps some uncomfortable combination of these possibilities. One of my earliest recollections of my own dad consists of the misapprehension that he was a "meeting man." Some of the children in my kindergarten had been exchanging various fantastic notions of what their fathers did for a living, and I had volunteered the somewhat puzzling information that my daddy was a "meeting man," that my civic-minded father went to meetings—of Civitan, of the hospital board—for a living. It seemed perfectly sensible to me, though it horrified my mother. My most powerful, and I think most accurate, perception of my father, though, was of how remarkable he was. Many of my friends, in fact most of them, seemed to regard their fathers as fairly ordinary. To me, my father was utterly, completely extraordinary. And not just to me, either.

Dad started out in life wanting to be a pharmacist. He attended Michigan's Ferris Institute (now Ferris State College), which had a fine

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pharmacy school. Since my paternal grandfather was a small-town grocer with seven children, there was not much college money on tap; so Dad became a volunteer fireman for the little town where Ferris is located. In return for risking his life fighting fires with primitive apparatus, he received free room and board.

He did the normal things that a college student in the 1920s did: goldfish swallowing, flagpole rushing, and the like. In fact, during one flagpole rush he, in his zeal, broke his shoulder. One of his friends, who later became a distinguished physician, mistook the break for a sprain and rubbed it with liniment—a prospect that sets one's teeth on edge just to think about it. That shoulder never did heal properly, which is no wonder.

My father was doing fine at Ferris until he hit his first chemistry course. It did not take him long to figure out that a pharmacist with no head for chemistry was not only a poor pharmacist, but a loose cannon. In casting about for another career he talked to his first cousin, Wes Sheldon, who was at that time a young attorney in Midland. Wes's notable enthusiasm for his profession communicated itself to Dad, who decided in time that he wanted to study law.

It was at this juncture that the family's financial status, heretofore a challenge, became strained beyond capacity. If Dad could barely afford Ferris Institute, law school was out of the question. Accordingly, he ended up being one of the last people in Michigan to prepare for the bar exam, not by attending law school, but by "reading law" with an attorney-tutor.

For seven years my father read law with Uncle Wes. They studied together, went to court together, talked law together. During this period, Dad, in order to earn his daily bread, worked on the assembly line in a General Motors plant in Flint, Michigan, where the family had moved from St. Ignace, a village in the Upper Peninsula. My father, by the way, so opposed this move that for a while he actually boycotted it, living with an aunt in St. Ignace.) In those pre-union, pre-regulation times, the air in "the plants" was so thick with dust, fumes, paint, and vaporized metal that it sometimes looked like fog. When my father went to his foreman and asked if something couldn't be done to clean up the air, the foreman looked at him and said, "Bobier, if you don't want this job, there are plenty of other guys who do." Since this was during the Great Depression, the foreman was inarguably right. My father went back to work and ended up with pulmonary tuberculosis, probably because his irritated lungs were so vulnerable to infection.

Dad failed the bar exam his first time around. That is a common occurrence, but it shook him profoundly—so much so that the second time he took the exam he was a quivering wreck. During the testing time

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an established attorney saw my father in the hall, pacing off his nerves like a caged jaguar. "Calm down," the attorney told Dad. "They don't expect you to know everything. They just want you to make a noise like a lawyer." Dad went back inside and passed.

He started out in law as an attorney for an insurance company and later went into private practice. He soon moved out of criminal law entirely and confined himself to civil matters, because it bothered him to defend, and be obligated to try to keep out of jail, people he knew were guilty. If I had some of the experiences that befell him, I might feel the same way. Once, for example, he was representing a murderer—a strangler, to be specific. The man was entering a guilty plea, and Dad's job was to obtain as much leniency for him as possible. My father visited the strangler in his cell in the Genesee County Jail. In the course of discussing the crime, Dad asked, "How could you have strangled somebody when your thumb marks were on the back of the victim's neck? Shouldn't the thumb marks have been on the throat?" The criminal rose from his chair. "It was simple," he said. "Here, I'll show you." He stood behind Dad and put his large, powerful hands around my father's neck with his thumbs on Dad's spine. "See?" the strangler said. "Yes! Oh, yes! Uh-huh!" my father replied, just before summoning the guard.

When I was twelve years old, Dad was appointed a bankruptcy referee. ("Referee" was later changed to "judge," since that's what bankruptcy judges in fact are.) His distinguished career on the bench took him into a labyrinth of rarefied, specialized law that the rest of us always regarded as impenetrable. To Dad, it was all beautifully clear, although he always complained about the murky, obfuscatory way in which the Bankruptcy Act was written.

I enjoyed watching my father preside over his wood-paneled courthouse in Flint's Federal Building. He would sit behind his bench gazing intently down at the proceedings from what struck me as a remarkable height. I considered him most impressive in his black robe; he was made even more so by the perpetual scowl he wore in court. Though he was naturally of a benign and even pacific temperament, my father, when concentrating, would draw his dark eyebrows down into a pronounced V that made him look not only stern but downright fierce. This was a great help in court, where it served as a visual enhancement of his authority.

I know of at least one occasion when Dad inadvertently, and powerfully, augmented this forbidding impression. While having lunch with a group of attorneys at Flint's University Club, Dad took a dose of what was, I believe, gout medication that consisted of white powder encased in a gelatin capsule. As was his custom, he washed the capsule down with hot coffee. I never understood how he could do that successfully,

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and this time he didn't; the capsule lodged uncomfortably in his esophagus. His attempts to rinse the capsule down with more coffee succeeded only in melting the gelatin, thereby releasing the powder, some of which found its way into his postnasal area. The resultant irritation made Dad sneeze mightily. When he did, two streams of medicinal powder—closely resembling smoke—jetted from his nostrils.

The usually voluble group of attorneys fell instantly silent. During his post-sneeze nose blowing, Dad could feel the other men looking at each other and, covertly, at him; but no one broke the stunned silence. Unspoken questions hung heavy in the air.

As he was putting away his handkerchief Dad was mentally framing an explanation for his unusual behavior. Then, as he later told it, he thought, "No. This is just too damn good." So he simply picked up the conversation where it had left off, leaving the bewildered attorneys to catch up as best they could. Dad never did tell those men what had happened, and none of them ever had the nerve to ask. If the Judge considered it a normal occurrence for smoke to come out of his nostrils, then they weren't about to question the matter.

The smoking-nose incident illustrates something about my dad that many of his acquaintances never knew: he was a practical joker. He never went for the easy, joy buzzer, cellophane-under-the-toilet-seat kind of joke. He preferred jokes that were unique and unexpected and sometimes required considerable advance planning. Probably his most infamous practical joke was perpetrated upon my maternal grandfather.

This incident took place early in my parents' marriage. Dad had not made a tremendously good first impression on his future in-laws, owing to his having been two hours late for his first date with their daughter. (He had, it turned out, chased down a promising-looking column of smoke belching into the sky, only to discover that its cause was a heap of burning tires at the Genesee County dump. Apparently, the former volunteer fireman is as much a slave to his conditioning as an old fire horse.) Under the circumstances one would have thought that Dad, at least for a time, might have made an effort to behave with punctual probity around Grampa and Gramma. One would have been wrong.

On December 31, my father had been out delivering milk for Grampa's business, the Pure Seal Dairy, where Dad had worked for some years. Each customer plied the well-liked young man with various holiday concoctions. Consequently he arrived at my grandparents' house in a highly convivial condition, with a flask of vodka in his coat pocket. "Come on, Howard," he said to my grandfather, "I'll show you how to drink it like the Russians drink it."

To this day no one knows quite why Grampa, who was a teetotaler, consented. His lifelong abstinence from alcohol was certainly not due to

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any religious convictions, since he had none. Rather, it seemed to derive from a combination of health concerns and heredity: other people in his family were teetotalers, and so he was too. Whatever the reasons, Grampa was quite strict about it, so Mom and Gramma were stunned when he yielded to his son-in-law's blandishments.

Dad gleefully presented Grampa with two small glasses, indicating that the one on the right was vodka, the one on the left, water. He explained that the Russians—where he got this information is something else no one knows—would drink the vodka in one gulp, then chase it with water.

One can only imagine the reaction of a lifetime teetotaler upon downing a healthy shot of vodka, neat. Mom, Dad, and Gramma watched as Grampa coughed, choked, and turned bright red. With a gasp of "God!" Grampa started to guzzle the water—which, of course, turned out to be vodka too. As the crimson of Grampa's complexion deepened to a dangerous purple, Gramma, through her laughter, managed to dash to the kitchen and procure some actual water.

Lest the reader think such treatment of this, at the time, middle-aged gentleman cruel or harsh, let me simply say, without going into unseemly detail, that Grampa deserved it.

The story of the double vodka in disguise is an example of my father's persuasiveness, one of his signal characteristics. This part of my dad's personality was epitomized by something I saw happen many times when my family would venture onto Lake Michigan in my parents' boat. Amid much pseudoscientific and hopeful talk about weather conditions, lures, and thermoclines, we would set downriggers and troll for coho and lake trout. When, in such fishing, one catches a fish big enough to keep, the usual procedure is to weigh it, measure it, get on the radio and excitedly brag to all the other boats in the area about it, and then dump it into a dry picnic cooler, where it gasps and thrashes and makes alarming thumping noises for up to an hour before it finally expires, causing any present who are of tender sensibilities to glance uneasily at one another.

My father thought this procedure needlessly cruel. Accordingly, when one of us had reeled in a catch, Dad would place the fish safely on the deck, turn to the nearest person, and say, "Hand me the Persuader," which was his name for a foot-long, thick dowel that hung on a leather thong from one of the cabin bulkheads. Then he would smack the fish over the head a couple of times, euthanizing it before it was weighed, measured, and confined to the cooler. The Persuader subsequently would be returned to its nail to swing gently and ominously back and forth until it was needed again.

My dad was a great persuader himself. His persuasion was commonly

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of a benign nature and did not usually involve blows to the head. Nevertheless it was just as neat and effective as his method of dispatching large fish, and, like the fish, most of us never knew what hit us. Dad's persuasive skills were undoubtedly honed and heightened by his career in law. The law didn't make him a persuader, though; he was born that way.

The earliest incident I know of illuminating this aspect of Dad's character occurred when he was about twelve years old. His family, which included five brothers and a sister, was still living in St. Ignace. At that time—my father was born in 1908—St. Ignace was quite a bit wilder and woodsier than it is now, so it was not surprising when a skunk was discovered one day in the crawl space under the family's large wooden house. Everyone was excited at this news, which was made more disturbing because the skunk seemed to be in the process of digging itself a burrow under there, making the appalling prospect of an entire family of skunks living directly beneath the house a distinct possibility.

In the midst of the din that inevitably ensues when a large family has a skunk under the house, Dad managed to persuade my grandfather that if one shot a skunk directly in the eye, the creature would die so quickly it wouldn't have time to spray. Incredibly, Grandfather Bobier, who died before I was born but who, I have heard, was a sweet-natured and credulous man, believed this completely untested idea, which of course had been created on the spot by my father. With Grampa's permission, and with the entire rest of the family apprehensively observing, my dad crawled slowly and quietly under the house with a .410 rifle, carefully drew a bead on the very alert skunk, and fired.

Sure enough, Dad (who always was a dead shot) drilled the skunk right through the eye; and, sure enough, the skunk sprayed every drop of musk it had all over the underside of the house. The stench rose through the flooring and permeated the entire dwelling. Food was rendered inedible, and clothing was impregnated with the unmistakable pungency. Loving as the household was, my father nonetheless was temporarily rendered persona non grata until the children discovered that their skunky clothing, which my grandparents could not afford to replace, became so malodorous in wet weather that the teachers would send the whole tribe home from school. Thus was my father's good name restored.

At Dad's wake I heard many wonderful stories about him. One of the best was from my cousin Jim, who used to spend a great deal of time with my family when I was growing up. It seems that, on one of the many occasions when Dad took Jim fishing on one of Michigan's inland lakes, he was teaching my cousin, aged eight, how to fish with minnows. The whole point of fishing with live bait, of course, is that the wounded bait wriggles around on the hook, creating an appetizing display of prey for

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the fish one is trying to tempt. Jim, who grew up to be a gentle, sensitive man, was disturbed by the minnows' obvious agony. Dad, perceiving that his and Jim's afternoon of male companionship and instruction in woodland lore was in danger of deteriorating into hours of tearful grieving, displayed the same creative grace under pressure that he had shown in the skunk incident some thirty-five years before. He showed Jim a minnow, pointing out the horizontal stripe that bisects all such fish into fairly equal halves. "It's okay," Dad explained soothingly. "If you put the hook in above the stripe, the minnow won't feel it."

By what miracle of physiology a fish could develop such a nervous system I don't know; but to an eight-year-old, the explanation was sufficient, and the conviction with which it was delivered carried a great deal of weight. "I believed that for several years!" my cousin exclaimed to me at the wake. "Your dad was a real con man."

My mother smiled and nodded, probably thinking of the innumerable times she had been similarly persuaded. Mom was always the Apollonian in our household. Unlike the rest of us, she was orderly and neat. She made lists. She did all of the household accounting. As a schoolchild, she had won mathematics prizes, a fact that surprised none of us. It was her influence that kept the household from flying apart from the centripetal force of our own disorganized impulses.

She was the counterbalance to my father, who, brilliant as he was and logical in the law, frequently displayed a surprisingly disorganized, chaotic side characterized by a Dionysian impulsiveness. He would call my mother on Friday afternoon and say, "Let's go to the Island this weekend," a proposition that, including as it did the packing of numerous bags and boxes, a five-hour car ride, a trip on a ferry, and the management of three children, required a degree of planning akin to that involved in a minor military invasion.

My father's Dionysian side was frequently apparent on boat trips. We used to spend weeks at a time boating on the Great Lakes, putting in at various ports, seeing the sights, experiencing nature, and fishing. Anyone who has ever boated knows that one so engaged is very much at the mercy of the weather. My dad, though, with characteristic optimism, coped with weather-imposed limitations by turning them into opportunities. Rough seas to him were a challenge, as were storms; fog was beautiful and romantic. Mother, whose idea of roughing it is a hotel without room service, always advocated a position of caution, logic, and safety. Dad, however, was always ready to go.

And, usually, we went. We made more last-minute, hastily arranged weekend journeys to our island cottage than I can count. Moreover, I recall more than one occasion when my sister and I sat on the bow of the boat peering intently into the murk as Dad piloted us slowly through

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dense fog, occasionally cutting the engines so that we could all listen for sounds we needed to hear, such as the bell of a buoy or the throbbing of a freighter's engines or the lapping of water against a shoal. "You know," I would tell my sister, "fog is good for the skin. That's why women in the British Isles have such beautiful complexions." She would turn and stare at me, looking very much like Mother, who would be in the cabin doing navigational calculations and biting her nails.

Dad tried to teach us all the art of persuasion. I now realize that, in part, that was what our dinner-table conversation was about. My family did not sit around the table talking about baseball (which, at any rate, my mother and sister hated). Rather, we engaged in passionate debates about such enormous, thorny topics as feminism and capital punishment. Though feelings sometimes ran high, sloppy argumentation was not allowed and precise expression was highly valued. Someone was always jumping up and bringing the dictionary back to the table to look up a disputed word. Although Dad held just as many opinions as anyone else, he frequently served in the capacity of moderator, and also, when necessary, functioned as devil's advocate. None of us ever reached Dad's level of persuasiveness, but we all learned to place good argument above brute force, a characteristic that can stand a person in good stead.

My father's persuasive power was not a means for him cynically to impose his will, Rasputin-like, upon others. Rather, it was a gift. I am sitting here trying to imagine what our family would have been like without that gift, but the image just won't come. There's no denying that our life as a family would have been infinitely more organized and less tension-ridden without the mad dashes to the Island, the boat trips through the fog. But it wouldn't have been our life. Dad's role as the Great Persuader was a means by which the rest of us could stride into a spontaneous world of possibilities. By swaying us without violating our sense of autonomy, he led us into wonderfully chaotic realms of freedom and adventure.

In fact, my father was one of the most adventurous people I ever knew. He was not an adventurer in a grand, Teddy Roosevelt, big-game-hunting way. His adventures were smaller, even inner ones. That was how he became one of the nation's foremost experts on something as mystifying and impenetrable as bankruptcy law, and how, too, he became one of the finest of armchair historians (his specialties were the Civil War and World War II). Dad would eat almost anything at least once, just to give it a fair chance (except for calves' brains; he never would try those). He hunted in the rain, boated in the fog. He fiddled with the boat's engines (twin 290-horsepower Chryslers), the Judge, his dignity perfectly intact, clanking mysteriously in the bilge. He had adventures in plumbing, during which Mother frequently would leave

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the house to minimize her anxiety. In my mind's eye, I can still see my dad walking across the yard dressed in khaki or olive-colored work clothes, a shapeless hat firmly situated on his balding head, his determined, springy stride taking him toward some new project.

To take a walk in the woods with my dad was to see the smallest natural manifestations, because he would point things out—the tracings of a leaf, a small animal hunkered beside a mound of moss—and make sure you looked at it until you *saw*. Dad was the one who found the porcupine tree near his and Mom's retirement house in Pentwater, Michigan. This was a tree up which generations of porcupines had shinnied and in which they had nested, and around the base of which there was a gigantic compost of porcupine droppings, which turned out to be superior fertilizer. None of the rest of us had noticed any of these things. My father was the one who taught me to see, when I remember to look.

Dad didn't just see things—he saw people, and valued them. He made his family feel cherished through small gestures. As one example, throughout my parents' forty-eight years of marriage Dad invariably held Mom's chair for her at every meal they ate together, including breakfast. This was not just reflexive courtesy, but rather an expression of deep personal regard.

More important than such details, of course, was the attitude that underlay them. Children can be easy to ignore, and we had our share of times when that happened with our busy and frequently preoccupied father. Once, in fact, he promised me a pony by making the mistake of answering my questions reflexively while reading the paper. But generally, even when we were very small, Dad made a point of listening to all of us, responding to us, and appreciating us.

These qualities were in part what made him so good at being a friend. One of the privileges of being my father's friend was not only that you got to listen to him, but that you got to have him listen to you. Dad had a way of listening that made you feel as if you and he were the only people on earth. He would lean forward, concentrate, look into your eyes, study the floor, frown as if he couldn't bear to miss a single word, ask questions. Rather than waiting for you to stop talking so that *he* could start talking, he heard and responded. I've met many people, including professional psychotherapists, who were good listeners, but none of them came within a mile of my dad.

Obviously, there was more to my father's appeal than that he was a good listener. My mother once astutely observed that, when Dad walked into a room, it was as if someone had turned on the light. She was referring not to any show-business extroversion on my father's part but to the effect he had on other people. The listening was part of that. So was

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his continually active sense of humor, his inquisitiveness, his brilliant and unusual mind, his perpetual and genuine interest in, and concern for, the people he knew. Not to mention that he simply was a lot of fun.

When my father died, at least a half-dozen people told my mother, "You know, Harold was my best friend." (And, of course, that wasn't counting other best friends who had predeceased Dad.) One of his dearest friends—the physician of the Ferris Institute broken shoulder incident—commented on this pervasive feeling, saying, "Gee, I thought I was the one." "You were," I assured him, and truthfully. "You all were."

I know I was being truthful, because Dad was my best friend too. I remember one awful evening when I was going through an extremely painful personal crisis, and despite my being in my early thirties and he in his mid-seventies, my father held me on his lap, said nothing for a long time, and then quietly told me how he felt the day I was born: how happy he was that the baby was a girl, how he was the one who chose my name. I remember going to twilight doubleheaders at Tiger Stadium with him in the days of Norm Cash and Al Kaline, how the Tigers always, mysteriously, seemed to be playing the Orioles, and how my dad was always the only person in the entire stadium wearing a three-piece suit and a fedora. I remember Dad teaching me to play softball out in the backyard—how, for a while, we would have batting practice, and then I would put on the third-baseman's glove he had bought me and we would throw the ball back and forth. He taught me to throw overhand, not underhand as many girls learn, and to this day that seems to me to be the only valid way to throw a ball. We would gradually step farther and farther apart as Dad tested my arm, and we talked softly in the gathering twilight, the ball traveling back and forth between us, thumping satisfyingly into my mitt or my dad's palm, then airborne again.

One of my favorite memories of my father concerns Bois Blanc Island, which is in the Straits of Mackinac and is the location of our family's cottage. Some of the most pleasant times of my childhood were the rides we took after arriving there from our home in Flint, having driven for hours and then taken the ferry, arriving at the Island around midnight. My father was the architect of these rides.

Back in Flint, Dad's driving was famously thrilling, what with driving down one-way streets the wrong way (apparently a hereditary failing, since I've done it myself more than once); speeding (more heredity); passing other cars on hills after dark during blizzards; and gazing intently at noteworthy scenery while driving elsewhere than where his eyes were looking. On the Island, though, things were different. Mom, Dad, my sister Lynn, and I (my brother, Ray, was grown and gone by then) would transfer our bags and boxes from the ferry to the Jeep and

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then all pile in, Mom and Dad and the sleepy children. Dad would manipulate the choke, pump the accelerator, and start the car. It was several miles from the dock to our cottage, and so we had quite a long time together in the car. Mostly, we filled that time with singing.

We seldom sang in the car back in Flint, but on the Island we frequently did, especially on those long rides when we had just arrived at this place we loved so much. We sang old, old songs that Dad taught us: "Mary Lou," "Sweet Rosie O'Grady," and—our favorite—"Pleasure Mad," the edifying lyrics of which follow:

> I'm pleasure mad; must have my fun.
> I'm never sad; it can't be done.
> Good times are my passion! I must be glad!
> Ain't got no time to sit and pine, just pleasure MAD! MAD! MAD!

"Pleasure Mad," as may be imagined, was a Ferris Institute song. I only wish I could reproduce on paper the glee with which Dad invariably sang the last three words.

We always sang in harmony, which came naturally to all of us, and in my memory it's beautiful, a veritable Mormon Tabernacle Choir in a Jeep, driving through the darkness, harmonizing on what became known to us as "Island songs." The car's powerful headlights would wash the gravel road before us with sudden white light and briefly illuminate the trees that crowded the shoulders of the road; we could sense the depth of the woods beyond. Finally we would arrive at the cottage. Dad would turn off the engine, and we would climb out and stand, grateful to be in this place where we were surrounded by pine and cedar and balsam and birch, and where there was a thick, crunchy carpet of pine needles under our feet and a green fragrance like a perpetual Christmas. We would look up and see Island sky, free from pollution and from ambient city light, a deep black night sky sprayed with millions of stars, most of which we never saw in Flint. Standing beside our Island car, listening to it gently ticking as it cooled, and being able to hear that because the silence was so deep, we would absorb the quiet and take a deep breath of Island air and turn toward the cottage, my sister and I knowing that no matter how late it was we could rely on Dad to build a fire in the fireplace as we walked sleepily through the cottage, unpacking, lighting the gas lamps, making ourselves at home at the end of a long drive through the night in a car full of music.

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Stepping Out

ROBERT PACK

If we could step outside the Milky Way, we could see that it is an immense spiral disk, its diffuse arms twisting around a central bulge of stars within which hides the galaxy's mysterious nucleus. . . . We see that the arms are delineated by bright blue stars and contain lots of dust and gas concentrating in star-forming nebulae. Our own sun is located on the inner edge of one such arm, the Orion arm. . . . Burning away hydrogen in their cores, cooking up helium, making adjustments, [stars] sing and vibrate for billions of years. . . . Eventually the sun will turn into a red giant and then into a white dwarf, a tiny star shining with the last reserves of its energy.

—Heinz Pagels, *Perfect Symmetry*

All right, let's go, Professor Pagels,
but I'll want to stay
a step behind you since that's not home turf for me
out there—outside the Milky Way,

beyond the borders of Vermont, even
beyond the rocky coast
of Camden Harbor, Maine, where boyishly I watched
returning fishing boats

haul in their lobster catch in boxes
clustered with a mess of tails and claws,
and wished the mind could spell itself
a while from its own laws

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without disturbing Nature. Now I stroll
with you in space to see
that twisting spiral disk of gas and dust whose arms
contain evolving nebulae;

to gaze, meandering, upon the bulge
of bright blue stars which hide
the still elusive nucleus
of our own galaxy. And there inside

Orion's arm is our own sun—
one ordinary star, except to us;
from here, beyond the Milky Way,
we see her as she was

all those light years away, ago,
as if, preserved within the mind, her past
were now, her spectral waves
embracing us, although, at last,

the fiery news of her distention—
death for Earthlings—might
be speeding here upon its way.
Can we, aloft in thought's consoling flight,

return in time to warn them,
saying: Take one quick, concluding look out far
where, sword in hand, Orion
stares at Taurus, and our sun, our mother star,

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no maiden like the Pleiades,
must undergo her fated change and swell
into a giant like
bloated red Betelgeuse who also will

decay into a cool white dwarf
shining with its last reserves of energy.
Earthlings, it isn't personal,
forget it's you whose life must cease to be,

then the vibrating night
looms more magnificent to muse upon; forget—
as if you lived only in thought
forever fixed in what you see. And yet

our sun, Professor Pagels, homesick,
how I'll miss our sun, to her
let constellations sing—then on, my friend, lead on
to neighboring Andromeda.

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John Bartlow Martin

JOHN FREDERICK MARTIN

John Bartlow Martin, my father, the writer and diplomat, was a midwesterner by birth and remained one by choice. Born in southern Ohio, raised in Indianapolis, he began his writing career in Chicago, then moved to the North Shore suburbs in that city, where he lived for nearly half a century. From time to time in his life, he left the Midwest, but he always returned. As a young man, he was dazzled by the glitter of New York, where his literary agent and publishers were. He spent some time writing in Hollywood, months on trains and planes campaigning with presidential candidates, two years in the Caribbean as an ambassador, a summer in Lake Como, Italy. He loved Spain and Finland, and was for more than forty years sporadically yet passionately involved with the problems of the Dominican Republic. But he always returned to the region where he had grown up and, at last, where he died, in a hospital on January 3, 1987.

His father was an Indianapolis general contractor, building immense concrete structures —bridges, tunnels, city squares—throughout the Midwest. It was not from J. W., as he was called, that my father acquired an interest in words and writing; on the contrary, the large and loud contractor showed little understanding of his son's ambition to be a writer. There was never in their long relationship intimacy or rapport; but there was respect. My father liked to compare writing to the carpentry that his father had taught him. Before everything else, writing was for him a craft. He once wrote admiringly of the cast and crew of *South Pacific*: They "made so much sense. They were just workmen, as I was myself. Yet down to earth as they were, what they made was magic." For nearly fifty years, my father was at his desk by nine, broke for a half-hour lunch, was back to work until five, and took the weekend off, like any office worker or tradesman making a living; only he made stories.

My father broke free from the world of J. W. Martin in 1934 and began a career in journalism. He started out, while still in college, as a stock gummer in the Indianapolis bureau of the Associated Press. Soon he was a police reporter at the *Indianapolis Times*. After a year or two, he moved to Chicago—the mecca of the Midwest—and for several years wrote stories, many of them almost wholly invented, for the detective magazines owned by Moe Annenberg. Then he proposed a piece to *Harper's* about a German saboteur from Chicago, which was accepted and published. Soon his writing deepened. He began to write about crime in a social context, crime as the crisis or matrix through which we can learn about human beings and the workings of society, and other stories having nothing to do with crime. He did a piece for *Harper's* about Muncie, Indiana, and how the Depression and war had changed that city since the famous study *Middletown* had been completed in the 1920s; a piece about the Ku Klux Klan; a book about Upper Michigan; a book about his native Indiana, its racist heritage and its heroes, among them Eugene V. Debs. But the piece that made him was his story about the Centralia mine disaster in southern Illinois,

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the longest piece ever run (till then) by *Harper's*, and published in 1948.

One hundred and eleven men had died in a massive explosion of coal dust, an explosion that both the miners and the inspector responsible for this mine had long predicted; but owing to immovable bureaucracy and a cozy relationship between the governor's administration and the mine company, nothing was done to prevent it. My father concentrated on a few key elements: the miners and their widows, the union, the mine operator, the mine regulators in Springfield. Above all, the story was about the miners and their families, their smallness in a world controlled by others, their inexpressible sorrow, their deaths at the hands of a bungling, avaricious system. Ben Shahn illustrated the article in a collaboration and friendship that continued until Shahn's death.

From the Centralia article on, for the next fourteen years, my father wrote for "the big slicks," as they were called, the mass circulation magazines that paid well. He would propose ideas to editors or vice versa, then spend anywhere from a few weeks to six months doing legwork—in particular, interviewing—slowly assembling his massive case for ignorance, greed, confusion, or meanness in one or another of the systems that "run our lives." The big slicks were more serious then than they are today. In the allegedly complacent 1950s my father wrote an article on capital punishment, which ended with a horrifying description of an electrocution, for *Cosmopolitan*; another on abortion, which was both illegal and unmentionable then (the newspaper term was "illegal surgery"), for the *Saturday Evening Post*; others on white resistance to school integration, criminal justice, care for the mentally ill, also for the *Post*; one on the bloody Chicago stockyards for *McCall's*; and a series for various mass circulation magazines on the defects in criminal justice—on coerced confessions, illegal detention, no right to counsel, self-incrimination, illegal search and seizure. (He was forever skeptical of convictions obtained on the basis of eyewitness testimony after a witness in a murder trial identified him, sitting in the courtroom's front row taking notes, as the assailant.)

But that is to describe just the subjects; what really interested him were people: usually ordinary people, sometimes unlucky people, the way they talked, what they did for a living, what they thought, how they felt and hoped, how they were treated, why they behaved as they did (why they killed, or rioted, or divorced, or voted). He had a reporter's eye for detail and a novelist's fascination with character. People were not props, mere means of illustrating his larger point: they, their lives and troubles, *were* his larger point. He described with nearly equal sympathy, and uncondescendingly, the white segregationists resisting *Brown v. Board of Education*, slumdwellers in Chicago's South Side, members of a murderous gang in rural Illinois, overworked doctors in a state mental hospital, and both the assailants' and the victims' families in any number of bloody murders.

If he had written about the Exxon *Valdez* accident of 1989, it would have been more than just the environmental issue that would have occupied his attention. He would have wanted to tell about the captain, what he is like, what his family is like, his drinking, what it is like to run a huge tanker, and about the fishermen, their families, their history in Alaska, what it is like to make a living fishing for salmon. He would have built up narrative pull by reconstructing the events, minute by minute, leading up to the instant the tanker hit Bligh Reef; that is what would have kept us reading. But his concern would have been to bring alive the people involved.

Certainly my father did not think of himself as an "investigative reporter," that self-important, self-congratulatory term that came along a decade or two after his heyday. He did not seek to uncover scandals, or to expose public malfeasance, or to preach. He was not the first to expose negligence in Centralia; the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* had done a good job of that already. Nor did he believe that his pieces would change the world. Every now and then some good deed was done as a result of his work. A man wrongfully imprisoned was released. Mine safety regulations were rewritten. These consequences gave him undeniable satisfaction, but he had no illusions about his influence on social conditions. As he wrote in his memoirs, forty years after the Centralia piece, "coal mines are still blowing up for roughly the same reason that Centralia blew up." Reform was not the goal; the reader, stimulating his capacity to feel, was.

His was, therefore, a literary conception of his craft. He was creating a world of interesting characters and fateful events, where be-

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fore there was nothing but a stack of blank paper. A crime was little more than a mass of complicated, unconnected, and forgotten facts until he conceived his piece and wrote it, moving the reader with an unfolding tale of villainous conduct, or bungling, or needless human loss. Structure, character, feel, conflict, and resolution: these were the elements that preoccupied him in writing.

Ironically, his prose style was nearly devoid of feeling. My father wrote in a plain style, favoring strong declarative sentences and syntax that sped the reader's eye along the page. He preferred short, flat statements to loopy thoughts and dependent clauses; he was lavish with facts, stingy with opinions. Details mattered: what color shirt the murderer wore while thrusting the fatal knife; precisely how many volts of electricity coursed through an electrocuted man's body; exactly where the miners' wives sat (they didn't know they were already widows) while awaiting news of their husbands. Of such details were his pieces made. His case was built by a cold piling on of facts, and any emotion, never betrayed by the author, was expressed either by characters (unaccompanied by editorial comment) or by the accumulated facts. The author's own voice remained detached and dispassionate, even while he presented issues in such a way that the author had to have been deeply engaged in them.

To a degree, my father in his own personality exhibited this same mixture of feeling and dispassion. I have never known anyone more capable of empathy than he. A story well told, a recording of a political speech, certain music, a play on Broadway: all these things—even his own reading out loud from a passage of *Howard's End* or Lincoln's letter to Lydia Bixby—not just *could* but inevitably *would* produce tears from my father. He had the lightest emotional trigger in the world. At the same time, he was streetwise as only a police reporter can be. He was a speech writer for every Democratic presidential nominee from 1952 to 1972 and understood the guts of politics—relationships, barters, people wanting things. While he was easily moved, he was not sentimental. When things broke or were stolen or lost, he shrugged. He understood change: time moves on, people grow old, nothing stays the same. I never knew anyone more matter-of-fact than he: more direct, straightforward, and capable of telling (or bearing) the most awful news without drama. He described to me in detail what path the cancer would take that was unstoppably killing him and how he would die, in the same matter-of-fact tone that he had used with me before when, say, giving driving directions to Upper Michigan.

So his writing voice, a combination of aloof matter-of-factness and just barely suppressed emotion, was to an extent an expression of his personality. But it was also the expression of a generation's style. When my father started writing, he read Hemingway, who accomplished as much by what he didn't say as by what he did say. This purposeful restraint, practiced by many novelists thereafter—and by Edward R. Murrow in broadcast reporting, by jazz musicians in their music of controlled emotion, by the makers of countless popular movies of the 1940s and 1950s, by President Kennedy in, say, his televised address on civil rights—packed great emotional power into spare, compressed language, as if the emotional matter they were handling was so potent that they had to contain it within flat, uninteresting language. The result, of course, was high drama: a calm surface—a matter-of-fact tone, the world-wise attitude—contrasted with, underneath, a volcano of anger, love, and outrage. *High Noon* may be the epitome of a generation's style: so little said, so much felt.

In this style, with increasing success, my father wrote his free-lance pieces and also books that derived from his pieces—on mental health care, prisons, Jimmy Hoffa, segregation—through the 1950s. He won several times the preeminent magazine honor of the era, the Benjamin Franklin Award. Several of his stories were made into movies for television and screen. He was among the few free-lance writers in America able to make a living from his writing. And it was a good living: with a big house in Highland Park, a country home, later a winter home as well, and tuition for three children in expensive schools. For a free-lance writer, my father did well. He had a bookkeeper's precision with money, was neither profligate nor cheap, denied himself nothing he wanted, saved well, and always worried about money.

As a result of his covering the Rackets Committee and Jimmy Hoffa, he became friends with Robert Kennedy and in 1960 joined the Kennedy presidential campaign as

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a combination speech writer and advance man. After the election, President Kennedy sent him on a fact-finding mission to the Dominican Republic, where the longtime dictator Rafael Trujillo had just been assassinated; then in 1962 Kennedy appointed him ambassador. Never has a United States ambassador thrown himself more into his job, or interfered more in local politics, than he did in the effort to forestall coup attempt after coup attempt and to shore up the first democratically elected government in the Dominican Republic in more than thirty years. But eventually he and Juan Bosch failed; the military took over; my father returned to Washington; two months later President Kennedy was killed; and my father resigned. He licked his wounds, which were deep. Ours was a house in mourning for several years after 1963, not brightened until Robert Kennedy ran for president in the spring of 1968, when both of my parents joined the campaign. They were with him in Los Angeles when he was assassinated, an event that broke the back of my father's spirit.

Once, briefly, he returned to government service, when the Dominican civil war broke out in April 1965 and President Johnson asked him to help arrange a cease-fire. My father went there and did so, and, although he arrived after Johnson had sent the marines, he defended Johnson's action. This earned him the criticism of a great many fellow writers and fellow liberals, who denounced United States intervention. My father saw it differently. Not only were Dominicans slaughtering each other, but one of the likely victors was a group whose leaders were trained in Cuba and were bent upon imposing a Castro-like dictatorship on the country. My father's view was that, if this was preventable, it should be prevented, both for strategic reasons (because the Dominican Republic was a large Caribbean nation close to United States territory) and for moral ones (it seemed unjust that the Dominicans, just freed from thirty years of right-wing dictatorship, were now to be submerged indefinitely under left-wing dictatorship). Although as a rule he opposed military interventions, he opposed even more strictly a rule-bound approach to foreign policy. Early on he was against the Vietnam War because it was impractical, costly, and a long way off, not for reasons of doctrine. In later years he thought President Carter mistaken to make human rights the centerpiece of his foreign policy precisely because that was too inflexible a doctrine by which to steer our government. He did not think government could be led by theories. And he refused to think it was illiberal to use American power to advance American interests.

Through the 1960s and the 1970s my father continued to write, but he concentrated on books rather than articles: a book about his ambassadorship, *Overtaken by Events*; another on the effects of television on presidential politics; and his two-volume biography of Adlai Stevenson. There were times he regretted spending ten years, at the height of his powers, on Stevenson; on the other hand, he knew that this biography would stand the test of time better than anything else he wrote. He wrote and rewrote but never published a book about Smith Lake, the lake and land he owned in Upper Michigan. It was frustrating to him that he could not make clear to others—editors, his agent—what was so special about this place. The woods, the clear dry air, the animals and fish, the difficult circumstances of living in the wilderness, the solitude: it all meant so much to him, but just why was impossible to communicate. Perhaps it was because Smith Lake, not truly remarkable in itself, though remote and beautiful, was a refuge for him and could not be so terribly important to anyone who did not escape to it as he did for the reasons that he did.

He went to Michigan because his father had always taken him hunting as a boy, on cold autumn mornings in an Indiana cornfield, and he had come to love the outdoors, especially the woods, and to dream about someday hunting and fishing in the great north woods. But he also spent more and more time in Michigan because, by the 1970s, his candidates had all died: Adlai Stevenson, John F. Kennedy, and Robert Kennedy. The big slick magazines had given up publishing serious articles. In the early 1960s, one of them had published a piece by him critical of television; two decades later, magazines were imitating that video wasteland. He was dismayed to see journalists transformed, with the help of television, into celebrities and newsmakers, self-righteous leaders in their own right, who seemed far removed from reporters who worried about proportion and restraint in their writing and stayed in the background of their stories. And the main liberal causes—civil

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rights, civil liberties, internationalism, union rights—had become not only unfashionable with the country at large but also with his own Democratic party. For him, the 1980s were a little like that age (in Joseph Conrad's phrase) "in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel."

So he went to Michigan. But even this may not be the whole reason for those months spent in isolation with my mother. My father liked solitude. He did not seek to be surrounded by people or to travel with a particular set. It was not for him to spend time on the telephone, gathering gossip or offering unsolicited advice. Nor did he interfere in other people's business. He was opinionated but not severe in judgment, and he was forever coming to the defense of someone whose defects were plain to everyone else in the family. He believed, as he often said, in "live and let live." He let people alone, and as years went by, more and more, he wished the same from them. So the time he spent in Michigan perhaps had nothing to do with these larger changes occurring in the world around him and were, more simply, the natural increase of a tendency toward solitude within him. He was as independent a person as you were likely to meet, though not belligerently so.

Whatever the cause, during his last two decades, come spring of every year, he would pack up the car with manuscripts and papers and books and liquor not available in Michigan, throw in a few clothes on top, and drive with my mother eight hours north, as he had done on the day they were married in 1940, to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Since their wedding, they had bought a lakeshore cabin and then sold it because too many people came to inhabit the area; and then they had bought more than two hundred acres of wilderness, upon which, over the years, they built two log cabins, a guest house and office, and a log sauna. My father loved to build, or to overbuild, as he used to put it—laying joists for a porch floor capable of bearing a three-story house (or assembling enough research on Adlai Stevenson for three biographies, not one).

Once unpacked at camp, he and my mother would spend three to four months there, with no phone, no television, no radio. A generator powered the electric water pump. The nearest neighbor was an hour's drive by jeep over a primitive road, the nearest town an hour and a half. They would go to town once or twice a week for mail and groceries, a trip they came to dread, so much did they dislike leaving Smith Lake. Come fall, with sadness, they would return to their house in Highland Park, to hibernate for the winter.

After my father quit teaching journalism at Northwestern University, my parents would go out so seldom in Highland Park that they could go nine months without refueling the car, and would start out for Michigan in the spring with the same tank of gas they had put into the car while driving home the previous fall. The center in my parents' life during my father's last twenty years was not his books or campaigns or even their friends; it was this wild, remote, and lonely lake.

Something else he liked about Michigan was the people, many of them first-generation Finns, who scraped together a living out of mining or logging, endured long, bitter cold winters, and out of this punishing experience developed a dry, underdog humor. He felt most at home with these people. His best friend anywhere was Earl Numinen, a highway engineer who lived in Michigamme, Michigan. Among his other friends were a gas station owner and a tavern owner, a miner, and a former sheriff. All his life he identified with working people, perhaps because his father had been a tradesman and builder. My father was a union man. His book on his ambassadorship is dedicated "To the Dominican People." When he was drafted during the Second World War, he refused to enroll in Officer Candidates' School, although as an educated professional he was urged to do so by the army, because he thought it undemocratic to be so elevated on account of his background. (He later regretted this decision as a piece of misguided idealism on the grounds that he could have done more for the war effort as an officer than as, first, a typewriter repairman and, second, a criminal investigator.)

Being such a fervent democrat, he did not have the intellectual's usual disdain for popular culture. On the contrary, he believed in its possibilities, just as he believed in the power of a good political speech. His idea of heaven was reaching a mass audience with a serious piece of writing or rhetoric (his idea of hell was academic life). This perhaps explains why one of the most affecting passages in his

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memoir, published just before he died, was his description of going to New York in the 1940s to meet with his editors and agents—taking the comfortable Twentieth Century Limited, having lunches and dinners with Frederick Lewis Allen of *Harper's*, or Stuart Rose of the *Saturday Evening Post*, perhaps the publisher Alfred Knopf, his literary agents at Harold Ober Associates, then spending the night in the Algonquin, and the next morning boarding the train homeward to the Midwest, his mind already conceiving the next story, how to make the characters come alive for the reading public. For he was paying tribute not only to an exciting era of his own life, but also to a world of craftsmen, of writers and editors of taste, of magazines that published serious articles, of television that on occasion aimed high, a tribute to a time when popular culture had something to say.

It remains a mystery to me exactly how the son of an Indiana contractor acquired from his earliest years, like Eugene Gant, the irrepressible need to express himself, to be a writer, and with little education or help from others pulled it off. But certainly it was his good fortune to come along at a time when there was a market for his work. Then it was still common for a serious writer to speak to a mass audience, and our literary life had not yet been divided into two isolated camps of the maudlin and illiterate on the one hand, and the specialized and esoteric on the other. One wonders whether that mid-century democratic culture, of which he was proudly a member, will ever be knit back together.

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An Evening with Louis Armstrong

JACOB A. STEIN

In the late 1950s, Doc Pressman's Randolph Pharmacy, located at Fourteenth and Randolph Streets in Washington, D.C., was a meeting place for a number of musicians. There were the locals, Jack "Jive" Schaffer, Roger Calloway, and Buddy Garrison, and also some well-known jazz musicians who would occasionally drop in when they were in town. Doc Pressman was both proprietor and pharmacist in residence. He could be found behind a counter at the back of the store. There he was comfortable among shelves containing thousands of pharmaceutical potions, drugs, vitamin pills, retorts, and odd-shaped glass containers. Doc believed in the therapeutic efficacy of vitamin pills, especially of vitamin E, which he believed, when taken every day in huge quantities, would cure anything. Whether Doc made an independent study or whether the salesman for Hance Bros. vitamin company brought this knowledge to his attention is now unknown and beyond the reach of further research. He was always busy and cheerful. He moved pills very rapidly into small containers. He typed out labels. He actually prepared ointments from the original elements.

Doc, although licensed only as a pharmacist, drifted into the casual practice of medicine by treating a constituency suspicious of orthodox diagnostic techniques. Doc relied heavily on the *Merck Manual*, drug company handouts, Hatha Yoga, and Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*. Doc's musician clientele required a pharmacopoeia to help them stay up all night and remain awake all day. (Winston Churchill's physician, Lord Moran, wrote of a somewhat similar problem that Churchill had—he required pills to go to sleep and pills to stay awake.)

Doc purchased one of the first tape recorders manufactured after the war, and he committed his large jazz collection to tape. The tapes played continuously in the back of the store. Doc's favorite was Louis Armstrong's "Satch Plays Fats," the Louis Armstrong recording of Fats Waller songs.

Doc tacked to his small, cork bulletin board postcards from musician friends. Among the cards were several from Louis Armstrong containing affirmations of the remarkable qualities of vitamin E and evaluations of laxative samples that Doc had supplied for him.

One late afternoon in 1955, in the middle of June, Doc said in a casual way that I was to come along with him to meet Louis Armstrong, who was performing at an open-air theater in Washington that advertised itself as providing music by the stars under the stars. Doc said he had word that "Pops" was running low and needed his medicine cabinet restocked.

Doc put up a satchel full of vitamin E, vitamin C, and assorted other pills and laxative samples, and I was actually on my way to meet one of the few men who had gained lasting worldwide fame according to the precise terms he had chosen for himself.

We arrived early at the theater and found our way to the dressing-room area. There was no security. We heard the sound of warm-up music as we wandered around asking questions until we found Louis Armstrong's dressing room. I was apprehensive that Doc didn't know Louis Armstrong as well as he made it appear. Would we be just intruders? Doc knocked on the half-opened door of Louis Armstrong's dressing room. He was seated

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opposite a small table with a mirror above it. On the table were bottles of various pills, bottles of lotion, and bottles bearing the name Pluto Water. The trumpet was on the table, horn end down. He was wearing a bathrobe. He had a large white handkerchief tied up around his head like a hat. Black-rimmed eyeglasses rested on his forehead. He had not yet put on his pants. His white silk stockings were rolled down to his black shoes. He was carefully dabbing a cotton wad into a lubricant and then applying the cotton to his lips. A tape recorder played. Louis Armstrong, without getting up, gave Doc a warm, friendly, husky-voiced greeting. I saw at once that they were real friends, comfortable and relaxed in each other's company, nothing forced.

There was a general flow of conversation concerning Armstrong's recent goodwill tour under State Department sponsorship. He told a few stories concerning food and accommodations in out-of-the-way places. Doc pulled open the satchel to show the contents. Louis Armstrong looked in at the portable medicine chest with great curiosity and obvious satisfaction.

As we talked, I noticed a young man somewhere between eighteen and twenty years old peeking into the dressing room. He was holding the hand of a pretty young girl. The young man caught Doc's eye, and then Armstrong turned around to see where Doc was looking. He saw the innocent young couple and invited them in. The young man was excited by this sudden turn of events. He told Louis Armstrong how thrilled he was to meet and talk to his favorite musician. Armstrong interrupted and asked how he was feeling. The startled young man replied that he was feeling fine. There followed Armstrong's discourse on the need for a good reliable daily laxative. He strongly recommended Swiss Kriss, the laxative he discovered in Sweden. He gave a handful of samples to the young man and woman and then turned again to dabbing his lips with the cotton swabs. The astonished couple withdrew. Doc and I saw that we should leave also because it was nearing show time.

As we were leaving, Louis Armstrong asked me if there was a song I would like to hear. I mentioned the 1932 recording of "That's My Home." He remembered it. He had not sung the song in years, but he was glad I mentioned it because it gave him a good test to see if he could do what he often said he could do—sing the words of just about all of the hundreds of songs he had ever sung. He said that the band would be plenty surprised to hear him start up "That's My Home," but they were all good fakers and they would be all right. He then asked Doc to give him a ride to the Annapolis Hotel after the show was over.

We took seats in the audience to the left of the stage. As the curtain went up the band played "When It's Sleepy Time Down South." Louis Armstrong stretched his arms wide, smiled and said, in a happy, low musical tone, hitting every syllable, "Good evening, everybody." The concert that followed included old favorites, "Blue Turning Gray Over You," "*I'm Confessin'*," "I Gotta Right to Sing the Blues," and "Saint James Infirmary Blues."

After an intermission the band returned, and four or five more songs rang out in that clear summer night. Then Louis looked in our direction, gave us a big stage wink, and he trumpeted into "That's My Home." He played it through just as he did on my old seventy-eight record. He then paused, took out his jumbo handkerchief, drew it past his lips, and sang both the verse and the refrain. As he finished he looked over at us, smiled triumphantly, and raised the trumpet into the air. It was a magic moment.

Thomas Mann described those few persons with the unique power to entertain as the dispensers of the joy of life. It is they who by displaying beautiful lighthearted perfection kindle a precious painful feeling, tinctured with envy and wonder, and who can suggest, just for the moment, that the world is filled with wonderful possibilities. For it is they who produce such stuff as dreams are made on.

There were a few encore numbers and then again the strains of "When It's Sleepy Time Down South." Those of us in the know knew that the entertainment was over—a wonderful evening under the stars.

Doc and I waited outside Louis Armstrong's dressing room. He walked out smiling and said that he was sure glad he knew the words to "That's My Home." I was tempted to remind him of his recording of "I'm a Ding Dong Daddy" where he momentarily forgot the words but then made a quick recovery. In Doc's car he joked about the young couple in his dressing room. But he once again empha-

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sized the importance of a good laxative, and he hoped the boy would try the samples. In his rooms at the Annapolis Hotel he had another tape recorder and dozens of tapes. He put on a tape of one of his concerts. He remarked how nice it would be to take a swim on a hot night like this. Doc asked if he was a good swimmer. Yes, he said, he was. It was easy to believe. He had an athlete's build and elegant posture.

Doc and Louis exchanged views on musicians, all diseases curable by patent medicines, Pluto Water, Jurgens Lotion for the lips, vitamins, and tape recorders. In conversation, Louis Armstrong was much as he was on stage. He used his enormous range of facial expressions as punctuation. If he said something ironic, he rolled his eyes. If he said something a bit pretentious, he struck a pose of mock seriousness and then growled out deep-throated laughter. He sprinkled musicians' slang into his conversation and used affectionate nicknames for his friends. Doc was Pops. Despite his having just given a two-hour performance, he was filled with a playful energetic enthusiasm for each subject that came up.

The quality of Louis Armstrong's conversation has been the subject of testimony by a number of witnesses. Tallulah Bankhead said of it: "He uses words like he strings notes together—artistically and vividly." His slang, first picked up by musicians, turned up everywhere. He occasionally wrote an article about musicians' slang.

After an hour or two, Doc stood up suddenly and announced that we were leaving. It was past two in the morning. Louis Armstrong wrote out a list of the pharmaceutical supplies he needed and told Doc where to send them.

During the ride home, Doc said he often thought of selling his drugstore and signing on as Louis's personal pharmacist. Doc did sell the store a few years later, but he did not travel with Louis Armstrong. He should have. Instead, he drove out to Las Vegas where the Washington, D.C., trumpet player Jack "Jive" Schaffer was making a good living at the Golden Nugget impersonating Louis Armstrong. Doc remained in Las Vegas several months. He must have spent lots of money. When he returned, I could see that he was uneasy without the drugstore. Doc had no family, and the old-timers in the store were his family substitute. No store, no family. Also, Doc was a born salesman. No store, no customers. He also missed his medical practice.

Doc's interest in the metaphysical brought him to Yoga religious services. He learned to sit in the full lotus position. He believed that he was in contact with supernatural forces and that reincarnation was the logical explanation of life's haphazard distribution of misfortune, health, wealth, and sickness. When he withdrew from this earthly existence, he intended to return as a seagull jumping around the beach in Atlantic City, preferably near a cabana at the north end of the boardwalk. Doc's friends could see that he was not doing well. He was even heard to question the therapeutic value of vitamin E.

Within six months after Doc's return from Las Vegas, I found that kind, gentle, helpful man dead, all alone in his small apartment. What happened to all his tapes and those postcards sent to him by the musicians? They had all disappeared.

When I picked up Gary Giddins's 1988 biography of Louis Armstrong entitled *Satchmo*, I looked for Doc's name in the index. There is no index. Too bad such a good book so lovingly put together has no index. Although the book does not mention Doc, it does have a picture of Louis Armstrong in his dressing room with a big smile on his face, just as Doc and I saw him. Another picture shows the Armstrong collection of pharmaceuticals, including a bottle of Pluto Water and the Jurgens Lotion. There are reproductions of several of Armstrong's postcards, just like the ones Doc tacked on the corkboard. Giddins has a few comments on Armstrong's Swiss Kriss evangelism and gives a theory to explain the obsession. He connects it with Armstrong's early life when he could not afford proper food and what he did eat caused digestive problems.

Giddins tries, through words, to describe Louis Armstrong's incomparable trumpet playing and singing. The best Giddins does is fail with honor because words cannot convey the effect of Louis Armstrong's prodigious capacity to entertain. Louis Armstrong was one of the very few entertainers who imitated no one but left behind legions of imitators. Al Jolson (who billed himself as the World's Greatest Entertainer) and George M. Cohan (described as both the Prince of the American Theater and the Man Who Owned Broadway)

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are in the small circle of unique entertainers. Neither had Louis Armstrong's influence, which continues to affect jazz and jazz musicians. There are two biographies of Jolson and two of Cohan. At my last count, there are ten biographies of Louis Armstrong, and they keep coming. Giddins underlines Louis Armstrong's hold on musicians by quoting Bunny Berigan's statement that all a jazz musician needs when he goes on the road is a toothbrush and a picture of Louis Armstrong.

Giddins describes the work habits of Louis Armstrong during the last twenty years of his life. Those work habits were simple: He worked all the time. Every now and then one of his records became a big hit. "Hello Dolly" was the big hit of 1964, and it brought Louis Armstrong back to all the talk and variety shows. He was always unpredictable and spontaneous. He sprinkled his conversation with his own slang creations and neologisms. By the time things were well under way, he had his host of the moment converted to the "Satchmo" style. His lively intelligence and wit, along with the powerful effect of his personality, created a compelling quality impossible to withstand. Everyone felt qualified to do a very good Louis Armstrong.

In the late 1960s Armstrong fell ill, but he continued to work. He appeared on television shows in New York and Los Angeles despite his many serious illnesses, including heart trouble and ulcers. He celebrated his seventieth birthday at the Newport Jazz Festival and then had to be hospitalized. Despite the hospitalization, his calendar continued to fill up with dates long into the future. He had to cancel his appearances because of a second heart attack that put him back in the hospital. He returned home on May 5, 1971, and made plans to resume his schedule. He died at home, two months later, with plenty of good well-paying work on the books.

He had, as Duke Ellington remarked, been born poor, died rich, and hurt nobody on the way. And his melody lingers on. Just about every recording he made is still in print. "That's My Home" has been moved from the original seventy-eight to an LP, and now it can be found all done up on a compact disc.

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Assyriology and the Canon

WILLIAM W. HALLO

The academic scene is rife with delicious ironies. In the midst of an information explosion, largely of American making, we are warned to beware of the closing of the American mind. In an increasingly secular climate, the Bible is assuming a new centrality in literary study. And in the face of growing disenchantment with established traditions of scholarship, new disciplines are clamoring for admission to the traditional curriculum.

I would like to address all three of these paradoxes, but from the perspective of Assyriology, a privileged sanctuary immune to scholarly fashions, in the eyes of its practitioners, or an ivory tower blind and deaf to the changes agitating other areas of study, according to its critics. But defenders and detractors will agree that the cuneiform inscriptions, for all that they may be an arcane and exotic specialty, also represent a last refuge of the generalist. They cover half of the five-thousand-year span of mankind's recorded history, and for much of this "first half of history" they constitute the main or even the only written sources anywhere on the globe. These inscriptions span the whole spectrum of human expression—from the minutest details of everyday record keeping, through the res gestae of kings, to the kaleidoscopic concerns enshrined in creative literature. And they do all of this on a scale quite unsuspected by outsiders.

The cuneiform sources are precious clues to the origins of many institutions that are with us to this day. Such everyday conveniences and conventions as writing, the alphabet, the calendar, the week, and the era-system of dating years all originated in the Ancient Near East. Fundamental innovations, such as the domestication of plants and animals, the invention of pottery, the urban revolution, or the institution of kingship are first attested there and frequently best documented in cuneiform. Profound confrontations with such issues as life and death, the nature of the divine, or the role of the individual were first broached in Sumerian texts, or later those in Akkadian, Hittite, and Ugaritic.

Thus Assyriologists cannot afford to specialize. Few in number and confronted by a daunting and still increasing body of texts on a bewildering variety of topics and in a considerable diversity of genres, Assyriologists must, like Daniel, master the "script and language of the Chaldeans" (Dan. 1:4)—but beyond that prepare to follow wherever their sources lead, from astronomy to zoology. At the very least, they must seek the collaboration of specialists in other fields. They may therefore be pardoned if they cannot themselves be specialists in all the periods, genres, and topics of their diverse texts.

One of the areas where Assyriology provides a curious anticipation of current concerns is precisely on the academic scene. Modern readers may well wonder that the pre-classical world had an academe at all, and indeed that word is of Greek origin, originally identifying the groves of the heroic or divine Akademos in a suburb of Athens where, in the fourth century, Plato and his pupils gathered to perpetuate the Socratic method or, as enshrined in Plato's imaginative reconstructions, the Socratic dialogue. This involved a method of teaching that was essentially obstetric—that is, by means of question and

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answer to draw out of the pupil the dawning recognition of eternal truths. The Romans therefore called this method of teaching *educatio*, which means literally a nurturing or raising, as of plants and animals, but by assonance—and perhaps by derivation—a "leading or drawing out." The Greeks, with their earthier view of matters, called it *maieutike*, meaning literally the method of the midwife. In any event, it represented an essentially spoken method of teaching and learning.

The older learning of the pre-classical Near East, however, was essentially written learning. Whether in the hieroglyphics of Egypt or the cuneiform of Mesopotamia, pre-alphabetic writing required the mastery not of twenty or thirty signs, but of hundreds. There was no royal road to this mastery. Rather, scribal schools were called for, complete with large scriptoria where pupils took dictation on papyrus or clay tablet. The very name for the scribal school in the cuneiform tradition was "tablet-house" (or possibly "house of the A-tablet," referring to the first primer used in instruction). Such tablet-houses were spread across the entire Near East, including Egypt, by the end of the pre-classical age; thus we may legitimately confine ourselves here to the cuneiform tradition (while admitting that the hieroglyphic tradition has its own fascination).

The cuneiform tradition as handed down in the scribal schools and in the scribal guilds that succeeded them was firmly anchored to a curriculum of written texts—or rather to several successive curricula, given the millennial history of the tradition. It is possible to identify four such curricula within ancient Mesopotamia. The two oldest were in the Sumerian language, the next in Akkadian (a Semitic language related to Hebrew and Arabic), the last in bilingual Sumero-Akkadian form. In the rest of the Ancient Near East, these curricula were adopted along with the cuneiform script, and often accompanied by translations into the local vernacular or, as in Anatolia, by new curricula in the native languages.

Within these chronological and geographical variations, the four curricula demonstrate a remarkable uniformity over wide stretches of time and space. Thus, for example, the Old Sumerian lexical lists were used to organize knowledge and propagate the newly invented cuneiform writing system from the beginning of the third millennium on; they are found as far from the Mesopotamian source of that invention as Ebla in Western Syria in about the twenty-fourth century B.C., together with incantations, which represent some of the earliest literary compositions attempted in the new medium. Or again, the neo-Sumerian hymns in honor of long-deceased rulers of dynasties, such as those of Ur and Isin, were dutifully copied even in schools of such cities as Uruk and Larsa, which had been their bitter rivals. Portions of the Akkadian epics about Adapa (the Babylonian Adam?), Gilgamesh, and Sargon were studied and copied in the middle of the second millennium as far away as El-Amarna in Egypt, Megiddo in Palestine, and Hattusha in Anatolia (modern Turkey). Sumero-Akkadian myths and lamentations about such age-old divine couples as Enlil and Ninlil or Dumuzi and Inanna were still being translated with almost slavish fidelity to the received text in the late first millennium B.C. The use of cuneiform, by now chiefly for astrology, came to its final end only in the first century of the Christian era.

Such fidelity to and tenacity of a written tradition, or what has sometimes been called a "stream of tradition," commands our respect. It also demands a descriptive label for that tradition, preferably the translation of a native term in line with the widely advocated preference for describing an ancient culture in its own terms. None such having been identified in this case (unless it be *pi ummani*, literally, the mouth—that is, authority—of the scholars), some Assyriologists have taken to referring to the cuneiform literary tradition as a "canon"—or, better, four successive canons—and to the individual texts that comprise any one of these canons as canonical. Other Assyriologists have strenuously objected. In Ancient Near Eastern studies, they argue, canon invariably evokes the image of the biblical canon with its overtones of religious authority.

A recent symposium at the National Humanities Center in North Carolina devoted to "The Hebrew Bible in the Making: From Literature to Canon" wrestled with just this issue. Narrowly construed, the biblical canon is indeed limited to those texts that any given community of faith—Jewish, Catholic, Protestant—considers as of divine inspiration and authority. But a broader concept of canon has also been emerging in biblical studies—one

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that extends beyond divinely inspired texts, indeed beyond biblical texts in much the same way that the traditional Jewish concept of Torah (literally "law, instruction") grew from identifying only the Pentateuch, then to the entire Bible (the "written law"), ultimately to the whole range of post-biblical explication and exploitation of the Bible ("the oral law") in the Rabbinic academies of the early Christian era. In Jacob Neusner's words, "Each Judaism defines what it means by the Torah, or the canon, and . . . various 'Israels' (groups of Jews) have defined their canons in diverse ways." Much the same could be argued of other faiths.

This wider sense of canon, then, would justify its application equally to the cuneiform as to the Hebrew corpus. More to the point, it would be in line with the original sense of the term that, once more, we owe to the Greeks. The Greek *kanon*, originally a rod or bar, then a rule, came in the sophisticated vocabulary of the great library and museum of Alexandria, which were founded about three hundred years before the Christian era, to refer to the accepted, authoritative collection of books by any given author, and eventually the books—by whatever author—that found a place in the library and in the curriculum of the schools. We still speak today in this sense of the Alexandrian canon.

As applied to subsequent literature, the term *canon* has generally been used in both of these meanings by literary critics. Thus the Chaucer canon, for example, is generally understood to refer to those compositions whose attribution to Chaucer is beyond serious question. More interesting, and certainly more under current discussion, is the other meaning of the term. When critics and educators speak of "the canon" today, they are referring to the whole body of writings that, by a kind of common consent, constitutes the intellectual equipment of the educated person. In other words, they are once again equating canon and curriculum, just as the Alexandrians did in the first place, and as some argue the cuneiform scribes did before them.

The reasons why, in this usage, the concept of canon is the subject of so much current discussion are at least twofold. One is that the common consensus has broken down. The canon may be equated with an ideal curriculum—but the real curriculum, at least of the typical American college, has left it far behind. Critics of American higher education, such as Allan Bloom, regard this discrepancy as an unmitigated disaster. He would like nothing better than to see the curriculum once more equated with the canon—and both of these equated with "the Great Books." By this he seems to mean essentially the great philosophers, from Plato to Nietzsche, or to Heidegger. In spite of the wide appeal of Bloom's critique, it is unlikely that many universities will buy his prescription, either in its general or its particular form. From the Assyriologist's point of view, it suffers from a double irony. For one, it advocates the very technique of education that was the essence of scribal training in the cuneiform tradition—that is, the close reading of a common core of classical texts—while at the same time excluding from this core every component of the cuneiform tradition. Secondly, it implies the primacy of philosophy in education, when this is the one humanistic discipline that truly had few or no antecedents in the pre-classical world. Yet we have much to learn from the Ancient Near East in such diverse disciplines as history, literature, religion, art, and even science. One cannot deny a general disenchantment with philosophy—in its modern guise as one discipline among many, not in its original sense of the love of learning as such. The restoration of a canon or curriculum limited to Plato and his epigones would not restore the enchantment.

But disenchantment with the particular curriculum advocated by traditionalists does not necessarily entail a rejection of canon as such. On the contrary, another school of critics of the current academic scene is attacking the canon precisely because, presumably, it is worth reforming and saving in their eyes. That is the second reason why the canon is under siege today. The canon must in this view be changed, expanded, opened in order to survive. It must cease to be exclusively Western, male, elitist, and start to admit components of third-world, feminist, and black literature. From the vantage point of the Ancient Near East, more ironies! The Near East belongs to the Western tradition—indeed it is ancestral to that tradition, yet with the exception of the Bible is routinely omitted in surveys of Western civilization or, what amounts to much the same thing, is passed over quickly in the opening pages of a survey or the first hour or two of a course. Assuredly pre-classical antiq-

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uity and today's students deserve better. A few illustrations must suffice.

The figure of Gilgamesh is celebrated in lengthy poems in Sumerian, Akkadian, Hurrian, and Hittite that evolved over many centuries into an integrated epic narrative that is at the same time an essay on the theme of human mortality—the frontiers, in effect, of the human potential. Such was the appeal of the epic that ancient extracts from it have been excavated at sites as far from Babylonia as Megiddo in Israel and Hattusha, the ancient Hittite capital, in Turkey. The appeal continues to this day, as attested by modern adaptations in poetic or dramatic form. But Gilgamesh was only the latest and most familiar of the semi-legendary rulers of the First Dynasty of Uruk (the biblical Erech) to be celebrated in cuneiform literature. There are epics about earlier members of the dynasty that describe their campaigns against the rival city-state of Kish and the distant land of Aratta, the latter located far to the east, in Iran or even Afghanistan. And there are whole cycles of poems about Dumuzi, the ruler-turned-deity who, as embodiment of the dying and reviving fertility of field, fold, and orchard, was the subject of moving lamentations and, as partner in the sacred marriage with the goddess Inanna, was the object of much highly erotic love poetry.

Inanna was also celebrated in the world's oldest non-anonymous poetry—the work of a Sumerian poetess of the twenty-third century called Enheduanna. A princess, priestess, and prophetess into the bargain, this daughter of King Sargon of Akkad has left a considerable body of compositions of a very high caliber—seventeen centuries before Sappho. Her portrait has survived and her biography can be reconstructed in outline. Her work is finding its way into modern anthologies of women's poetry, and it does not stand alone. Other Sumerian compositions, including dirges, lullabies, love songs, and letter-prayers can be attributed to later princesses.

For the roots of black literature, we may turn to Egypt, which assuredly in one sense forms a part of the African tradition. A recent *New York Times Magazine* article may have overstated the case when it described "many of the words of Solomon" as "borrowed from the black Pharaoh Amen-En-Eope." In fact, Proverbs 22:17 through 24:22 are attributed by the Bible to unnamed "sages" (Prov. 22:17) and compared by Egyptologists to the thirty wise sayings of Amen-em-Ope(t), who was neither a pharaoh nor demonstrably black; there is even some disagreement as to the direction of the borrowing. But the basic point remains: if the curriculum is expanded to include a proper representation of Ancient Near Eastern literature, it can by that very fact begin to open up to non-Western (or at least pre-Western), feminist (or at least feminine-authored) and black (or at least African) components.

In fine, for all its apparent and splendid isolation, Assyriology (along with Egyptology) can contribute some suggestions for helping to resolve the paradoxes with which we began. It can help open the study of the biblical canon to the literary approach. It can help liberate the curriculum from a too exclusive preoccupation with Greek philosophy and its interpreters. And it can expand the canon—not only in ethnos, gender, and race but also in time, providing the perspective of a continuous literary and linguistic tradition that was already as venerable in Plato's time as Plato is today.

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Retelling *A Christmas Carol*

Text and Culture-Text

PAUL DAVIS

The words of a dead man
Are modified in the guts of the living.
—W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats"

So far from the *Christmas Ghost Story* being a colourable imitation of [Dickens's] book, numerous incongruities in the *Carol*, involving the unhinging of the whole plot, have been tastefully remedied by Mr. Hewitt's extended critical experience of dramatic effect and his ready perception of harmonies . . . to . . . a more artistical style of expression and of incident.
—Brief defending Hewitt's piracy of the *Carol*, 1844

Dickens is a terrible writer. In the original, Scrooge was mean and stingy, but you never know why. We're giving him a mother and father, an unhappy childhood, a whole background which will motivate him.
—President of Screen Gems, 1968

I

I cannot remember when I first knew the story of *A Christmas Carol*. I may have heard it read aloud before a Christmas Eve fire, or listened to one of Lionel Barrymore's annual radio performances, or seen a dramatic version at the town hall in Connecticut where I spent my childhood Christmases. I do know that my acquaintance with Scrooge feels preliterate, different from my sense of Dick and Jane, Dr. Doolittle, or Robinson Crusoe. I remember when I first met the Hardy Boys, but I feel as if I've always known Scrooge and Tiny Tim.

I doubt if my experience is unusual. For although the *Carol* began as a written text, it has been passed down orally from one generation to the next. In the thirties and forties, we knew the story through Lionel Barrymore, Ronald Colman, and the Roosevelts. Children today see animated TV versions or encounter Scrooge McDuck before they learn to read. The *Carol* has inverted the usual folk process. Rather than beginning as an oral story that was later written down, the *Carol* was written to be retold. Dickens was its creator, but it is also the product of its re-creators who have retold, adapted, and revised it over the years.

We remember the *Carol* as a cluster of phrases, images, and ideas. The images of Tim riding on Bob's shoulder or of Scrooge huddled behind his desk while Bob shivers on his high stool are etched on our consciousness. "Bah! Humbug!" and "God bless us, every one!" echo in our minds. Yet other parts of Dickens's story have almost disappeared from our folk version. Most of us do not remember, for example, Scrooge's journey to view the celebrations of the miners, mariners,

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and lighthouse keepers, or his vision in Christmas Future of the debtors whose holiday is lightened by news of his death.

Retellings of the *Carol* often seem to begin with the remembered story rather than with Dickens's words. In the innumerable adaptations almost nothing in Dickens's text has been sacred. Some versions eliminate Scrooge's nephew and his wife. Others turn them into a courting rather than a married couple. In some versions the Fezziwigs vanish. Others cut out all of the Christmas spirits. Although Scrooge appears in every retelling, he is not always the hero. His occupation changes from moneylender, to real-estate broker, to furniture dealer, to grain broker, to landlord, to CEO. His name remains the same, but the names of the characters around him are not so fixed. Scrooge's fiancée—Belle in Dickens's text—becomes Ellen, Mary, and Alice in other versions of the story. His nephew Fred is nearly as often Frank in other retellings, perhaps because the latter name seems more suggestive of his character.

Retellings often add to Dickens's story. Modern adaptors are apt to fill in Scrooge's personal history to explain his character. One elaboration, linking Scrooge's father's dislike of his son to the death of Scrooge's mother while giving birth to him, appears in several recent versions. So does the pilgrimage of the reformed Scrooge to the Cratchit family on Christmas day. Although this scene does not appear in Dickens's text, it is so lodged in the remembered version that even such an eminent critic as Edmund Wilson can write about it in *The Wound and the Bow* as if it does.

A Christmas Carol could be said to have two texts, the one that Dickens wrote in 1843 and the one that we collectively remember. I will distinguish the two by italicizing the title of Dickens's text as *A Christmas Carol* or the *Carol,* and I will capitalize references to the remembered version, the "culture-text," and refer to it simply as the Carol. The text, *A Christmas Carol,* is fixed in Dickens's words, but the culture-text, the Carol as it has been re-created in the century and a half since it first appeared, changes as the reasons for its retelling change. We are still creating the culture-text of the Carol.

All of Dickens's works have been adapted and altered. Most of his novels were on the London stage before they finished their serial careers, and in abridged, modernized, and motion picture versions they have all been told and retold many times. But none has been redone more than the *Carol.* It has been adapted, revised, condensed, retold, re-originated, and modernized more than any other work of English literature. For the theater *A Christmas Carol*—or just as often *Scrooge*—has been adapted by scores of obscure playwrights as well as by such recognized dramatists as George S. Kaufman and Maxwell Anderson. It has been scored for ballet by Ralph Vaughan Williams and others, and Thea Musgrave's opera (1979) is only the most recent on a list of operatic versions. On television and in the movies, the *Carol* has been acted, animated, mimed, marionetted, choreographed, and puppeteered. Its first dramatic reading took place on its first Christmas, and it has been read aloud ever since. Among its many famous readers are Dickens himself, Lionel Barrymore, and Eleanor Roosevelt. The list of dramatic Scrooges reads like a theatrical hall of fame, including, in addition to Barrymore, Basil Rathbone, Seymour Hicks, Bransby Williams, Sir Ralph Richardson, Sir Laurence Olivier, Sir Alec Guinness, Ronald Colman, Alistair Sim, Albert Finney, and George C. Scott.

New editions of the *Carol* appear annually. They frequently condense, rewrite, or otherwise "re-originate" the story. Even those that keep Dickens's words intact often accompany the text with new illustrations that envision Scrooge in a world that Dickens never made. Since there is an original text—the version published in 1843—one could match later versions against this text, distinguish the authentic from the inauthentic, and separate faithful versions that maintain the spirit of Dickens's story from false piracies that pillage the original to serve selfish ends. By doing so we could rescue Dickens from his many self-appointed collaborators.

But making such distinctions would not get us closer to understanding *A Christmas Carol* and its power. For the Carol is the sum of all its versions, of all its revisions, parodies, and piracies. It is as much the Hollywood animation or the Henry Winkler re-creation as it is the fine facsimile complete with copies of the original illustrations by John Leech. Disguised as Lionel Barrymore or Mr. Magoo, Scrooge has become common cultural property and is as deeply embedded in our consciousness as George Washington or Dick

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Whittington, Merlin or Moses. His re-originations since 1843 have produced a culture-text of remarkable diversity. Reappearing in new guises from age to age, Scrooge is a protean figure always in process of reformation. Dickens initiated a continuing creative process in the Anglo-American imagination. It is a celebratory history, one that affirms the excesses of our collective imagination and recognizes all of the versions of the Carol as manifestations of a myth in the consciousness of the industrial era.

II

Charles Dickens both invited and resented the collaboration that would turn *A Christmas Carol* from text into culture-text. He sought public involvement with the story as a way to awaken social concern and to prove to himself that he had not lost his imaginative power. He delighted to hear of good deeds prompted by the *Carol* and of public readings that gathered together the broad audience he envisioned for the story. But he was upset by some of the theatrical adaptations and, when some self-appointed collaborators wanted to share in the financial proceeds from the *Carol,* he angrily asserted his authority over the story. Dickens soon learned, however, that he had begun a process he could not control. Almost from the day it appeared, the *Carol* was literary public property.

Dickens dated the *Carol* from his address to the Manchester Athenaeum on October 7, 1843. He was struck by the good will in the faces of the working people in his audience and stirred to write a Christmas story addressed to a similarly broad national audience. For several months he had been looking for an appropriate response to the unsettling parliamentary report on child labor that had been issued in February. (See *The First Report of the Commissioners, Children's Employment Commission,* 1842, and *The Second Report,* 1843.) He talked in his correspondence of writing a pamphlet "on behalf of the Poor Man's Child" and of striking a literary "Sledge-hammer" by the end of the year. The working-class audience in Manchester may have rekindled this earlier resolve and prompted the sledgehammer blow that Dickens struck when the *Carol* appeared in December.

Dickens also had more personal motives for writing the *Carol.* In the autumn of 1843 the novel he was publishing in monthly parts, *Martin Chuzzlewit,* seemed to be losing the audience that he had attracted during the first seven years of his writing career. A study of murderous greed and hypocrisy, the novel called forth less of Dickens's idealism than any of the earlier works. He wrote in his letters of the "Chuzzlewit agonies" and complained of the novel "taking so much out of one." *Chuzzlewit*'s Dostoyevskian subject matter inverts the Christian virtues. Its worldly characters have faith only in money and hope only for gain, while Charity Pecksniff, the shrewish daughter of its hypocritical villain, performs a perverse denial of her name. The *Carol,* a story of genuine charity, provided welcome relief both for Dickens and his readers from the depressing world of *Martin Chuzzlewit.*

According to John Forster's *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1927), *Chuzzlewit* proved so financially disappointing that Dickens's publishers, Chapman and Hall, talked of reducing his monthly payment by fifty pounds. This threat, added to the financial pressures of a growing family and mounting household expenses, led Dickens to seek new sources of income. He considered leasing his London house and going abroad where he could live more cheaply. Instead of doing so, he invented a new genre, the Christmas book, and devised a new marketing strategy. Rather than turning over the *Carol* completely to Chapman and Hall, he kept many of the production decisions to himself so that he could keep more of the earnings. After the book appeared he paid close attention to the balance sheet. His correspondence shows that when the profits failed to meet his great expectations, he was greatly disappointed.

Dickens's financial and emotional investment in the *Carol* intensified his creative process. The writing was well under way by the end of October, and his sister-in-law said she had never seen him more excited by a project. He worked with such fervor that he "wept, and laughed, and wept again, and excited himself in a most extraordinary manner, in the composition, . . . thinking whereof, he walked about the black streets of London, fifteen or twenty miles, many a night" (January 2, 1844, letter to C. C. Felton). Dickens completed the manuscript by the end of No-

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vember, and on December 19, *A Christmas Carol. In Prose. Being a Ghost Story of Christmas* was in the bookstores, lettered in gold on the cover, with gold edges on the pages, and embellished with eight illustrations by John Leech, four of them hand-colored. It was Dickens's Christmas gift to the nation.

The British people took the gift and made it their own. Forster notes in his biography that Lord Jeffrey wrote to Dickens that the *Carol* had "done more good, ... fostered more kindly feelings, and prompted more positive acts of beneficence, than can be traced to all the pulpits and confessionals in Christendom since Christmas 1842." Nearly all the magazines praised it. Thackeray, in the February 1844 *Fraser's Magazine*, called it "a national benefit, and to every man and woman who reads it a personal kindness." By February, eight theatrical companies had mounted productions. And on Grub Street the literary hacks were even more expeditious in pirating Dickens's story than he had been in creating it. A magazine that specialized in "re-originated" versions of popular works, *Peter Parley's Illuminated Library*, immediately appropriated the *Carol*. By the twelfth day of Christmas, January 6, 1844, the first installment of its *Christmas Ghost Story* appeared, complete with some crude new illustrations.

Dickens was incensed. Although all six thousand copies of the first printing of the *Carol* had sold out and two thousand of the second printing were committed before publication, he saw the pirates killing his Christmas goose before it could lay its golden egg. On January 8, the Monday after the Saturday when the plagiarized version appeared, under the title of *Ghost Story*, Dickens filed suit against the pirates, Richard Egan Lee and Henry Hewitt. A temporary injunction forbidding publication of the second installment of the *Ghost Story* was granted on January 10, and on January 18, Vice Chancellor Knight Bruce continued the injunction, warning the brigands and vagabonds, as Dickens called the pirates, against foolishly pursuing their countersuit.

While the case was being heard, dramatists were also busy turning *A Christmas Carol* into post-Christmas gold. Among the eight dramatic productions mounted by early February of 1844 were Edward Stirling's adaptation at the Theatre Royal, Adelphi; Charles Webb's *Scrooge, the Miser's Dream* at Sadler's Wells; and C. Z. Barnett's *A Christmas Carol; or, the Miser's Warning!* at the Royal Surrey Theatre. By adding songs and enhancing the melodrama with characters like Barnett's Dark Sam, who tries to ruin Cratchit's Christmas by stealing his wages, these theatrical Carols took London by storm. The February 1844 *Athenaeum* remarked that their popularity threatened to rival that of *Jack Sheppard*, which was *The Mousetrap* of the 1840s.

Dickens attended at least one performance of Stirling's *Carol*, advertised as "the only dramatic version sanctioned by C. Dickens, Esqre." In a letter to John Forster on February 21, 1844, Dickens called it "better than usual, ... but *heart-breaking* to me. Oh Heaven! if any forecast of *this* was ever in my mind! Yet O. Smith [Scrooge] was drearily better than I expected. It is a great comfort to have that kind of meat underdone; and his face is quite perfect." At worst this could be considered a mixed review. In spite of his misgivings, Dickens made no attempt to close down Stirling's play or any of the other theatrical productions.

The Grub Street pirates seemed to expect similar toleration. They had "re-originated" Dickens's earlier novels, and he had made no objection. Legally, they contended, Dickens had given up his right to object because he had not challenged their earlier plagiarisms. They also claimed that their activity benefited Dickens by making his work available to an audience that it otherwise would not reach. In effect, they insinuated, they were his artistic collaborators.

These arguments merely increased Dickens's anger. Writing had been his escape from the poverty that dogged his childhood, a way to suppress painful memories of the blacking warehouse where he had worked as a boy while his father was in debtor's prison. His fragmentary autobiography reveals the psychic scars he carried from that experience, particularly the "grief and humiliation" he felt in associating with his common fellow workers, Poll Green and Bob Fagin, as they worked beside him pasting labels on blacking bottles. "No words can express the secret agony of my soul," Dickens later wrote, "as I sunk into this companionship." The pirates recalled these companions of Dickens's secret past. Venal, vulgar and greedy men, Lee and

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Hewitt held up an ugly mirror to the profession of authorship, and by bringing themselves forward as his literary collaborators they suggested to Dickens that writing was not the way to escape the blacking factory.

American critics reinforced these disconcerting reflections. When Dickens had spoken out on his tour of America in 1842 for an international copyright agreement to prevent the pirating of British books by American publishers, American newspapers called him greedy and self-serving. *American Notes* (1842) and the American sections of *Martin Chuzzlewit* revived these attacks. Dickens's obsession with royalties, the Yankee journalists asserted, exemplified the greed he so roundly satirized in the novel. How could his characterizations of the Americans be believed, they asked? How could his plea for charity be taken seriously? Lee and Hewitt may have reminded Dickens of his mercenary motives for writing the *Carol* and given some troubling substance to these American questions.

These threats to his self-assurance may account for the virulence of Dickens's feelings and the violence of his exultation on January 18 when, in a letter to Forster, he thought his case had been won: "The pirates are beaten flat. They are bruised, bloody, smashed, squelched, and utterly undone." But the celebration was premature. The pirates lost the legal battle, but they were bankrupt and unable to pay damages. They left Dickens with a moral victory and a legal bill for seven hundred pounds. To rub salt into the wounds, the pirates regrouped and, in only a matter of months, were again promoting their parasitic versions of Boz.

Dickens's reactions to the pirates and the playwrights reveal a contradiction in his aims for the story. On the one hand, he wrote to confirm his position as the voice for his established middle-class audience. At the same time he wanted to speak for the urban poor and write for a working-class audience such as the one he addressed in Manchester. Dickens tolerated the playwrights because they contributed to his recognition as the spokesman for his middle-class readers. As the embodiment of their belief in entrepreneurial achievement and success, Dickens was "the inimitable Boz," the literary magician who alone could have created and produced the *Carol*. The book itself represented these bourgeois values. Its hand-tinted illustrations and the gold leaf on the binding attested to the success and authority of its producer.

The cost of the illustrations and the gold leaf, however, made the *Carol* too expensive for the working-class audience that Dickens also hoped to reach. At five shillings, a copy of the *Carol* would have cost one-third of Bob Cratchit's weekly wages. The pirates charged only a penny for their retelling of the story. They argued in court that their work enlarged the audience and enhanced the popularity of the original. But as they changed Dickens's words, they also changed the class context for the Carol. In its crude pulp format, the *Christmas Ghost Story* no longer symbolized the bourgeois achievement of Charles Dickens. As the "imitable Boz," Dickens was no longer the image of success; he lost authority over the story. The *Ghost Story* reflected instead the world of its semi-literate readers, and in Dickens's eyes the pirates had "degraded" the *Carol* to make it, as he wrote to Thomas Mitton on January 7, 1844, "appear a wretched, meagre, miserable thing."

The pirates may have had a better case than even they were aware of. To reach working-class non-readers who might listen to the tale as they had listened to Dickens's speech in Manchester, the *Carol* needed to be lifted from the pages of the book and lodged in the cultural memory. The pirates and the playwrights were important participants in the beginning of this process. Along with Dickens, they were so successful that, in less than two months after the *Carol* appeared, the *Illustrated London News* in February 1844 commented in its review of one of the dramatic productions that "the story on which this piece is founded is too well known to enter into particulars of it."

In spite of his early reservations, Dickens later entered the process and became one of his own adaptors. When Dickens turned the story into a public reading, he edited and re-edited the text to suit the many audiences for whom he performed it. Although Carlyle objected to the readings as pandering to readers too lazy to read for themselves, Dickens knew that the story was new in each performance. As he shared the re-creation of the *Carol* with his listeners, he joined in celebrating it as a culture-text.

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III

John Forster, Dickens's friend and first biographer, said of the *Carol*, "Literary criticism here is a second-rate thing." Following Forster's lead, most literary critics have neglected the *Carol*. It is too simple, too popular a work to elicit rigorous explication. Commentators have preferred commendation to close analysis. Yet from a broader perspective, the *Carol* is one of the most criticized works of English literature. Every new edition, adaptation, parody, or sequel derives from an implicit critical perspective. Each rewriting of the culture-text implies a new reading of Dickens's text.

This body of Carol "criticism" articulates a cultural commentary. Because the Carol is so widely known and its re-creators so diverse in their class and cultural points of view, this criticism broadly reflects Anglo-American culture during the last century and a half. It is not limited to recording the prejudices of the literary elite. It mirrors the mainstream of our culture.

The appeal of the *Carol*, continuous since 1843, has waxed and waned. Some times are more Dickensian in their celebration of Christmas than others. I have chosen six periods of intense Carol activity to shape this cultural history of the Carol. Each period re-creates the story in response to its own cultural needs. Each contributes to the evolving culture-text of the Carol by rereading Dickens's words and imagining its own text for the *Carol*. I have described these "texts" and the contexts that produced them. In this blending of text and culture-text, one can see the process Auden described as "the words of a dead man [being] modified in the guts of the living." For the meaning of the *Carol* is not determined by the words of the author. Its meaning is created anew by each generation of readers.

The meaning of any literary work emerges from the interaction of the text and its culture, from the versions of the story created by its readers. Because there are so many public versions of the *Carol* and because these versions represent so broad and diverse an audience, the culture-text of the Carol exaggerates and makes visible the reading process. It provides a case study in literary theory and cultural history.

The Carol story begins in the 1840s, the decade of its creation. For Dickens's contemporaries the *Carol* was a parable. It told the same popular tale that George Eliot would later tell in *Silas Marner*, the story of a miser who learns charity through the agency of a child. But more important in the 1840s, Dickens's story proved that urbanization had not destroyed Christmas. In the British imagination, Christmas was associated with the manor house, peasant revels, and baronial feasts. During the first half of the nineteenth century—particularly in the two decades that preceded the publication of the *Carol*—the growth of industry and cities threatened this rural holiday by threatening its country seat. Dickens's story provided celebratory proof that the old Christmas could flourish in the new cities, in spite of dour Dissenting tradesmen who condemned Christmas revels. Scrooge's reformation thus became urban Britain's counter-reformation to puritanical excess.

The Victorian Carol connected the city to the traditions of the country. It also revealed a new urban world infused with spirits and so it became a kind of scripture. As Darwinism and doubt undermined the authority of the Bible, secular texts that assumed biblical authority were especially valued. Although we now see the *Carol* as a secular book, later Victorians of the 1870s, the decade following Dickens's death, read his Christmas story as a retelling of the biblical Christmas story. Scrooge became a nineteenth-century pilgrim, a modern-day magus seeking the Christ child, while the Cratchits reenacted the holy family. For later Victorians the Carol was secular scripture.

In the decade preceding World War I, the Carol was treated for the first time as a children's story. Remembering Dickens as their childhood reading, the parents in this golden age of children's literature passed the *Carol* on to the next generation as a children's classic in which Scrooge, in the Neverland of fairy tale, is transformed from the Baleful Ogre into the kindly grandfather. Although some thought of the story as a literary Peter Pan, a text that would not grow up, the carolers of the time, readers like Harry Furniss and G. K. Chesterton, melded the magic of the fairy tale with the darker adult dimensions of the story and turned childish merriment into myth.

In the years before and after the crash of 1929, some saw the Carol as a denunciation of

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capitalism, but most read it as a way to escape oppressive economic realities. The British denied the Depression by reaffirming a traditional Carol, but in America a revolutionary version of the Carol emerged that made Cratchit the protagonist. It suggested that Americans could escape the Depression by freeing themselves from European bankers and celebrating the Christmas of the common man. These distinctly British and American Carols inform the film versions of the thirties.

Restored to a central role in the sixties, Scrooge becomes himself a kind of revolutionary. In the postwar affluent society the "Carol problem" is no longer economic or social. The sixties Scrooge, a Freudian figure tormented by his past, subconsciously conjures up Marley as a way of calling for help. In therapy with the Christmas spirits, he learns to enjoy life in the here and now. After he has turned on to Christmas and tuned into joys he has denied himself, he joins the flower children in the streets to celebrate being human.

If there was joy in the streets of the sixties, in the eighties there is hunger and homelessness. Scrooge is again a social figure placed at the center of unsettling economic realities. The Carol has come full circle, for the economic issues of Dickens's time have been rekindled now when homelessness and the needy are again prominently in the news. The contradiction between self-interest and selflessness that inspired the *Carol* in 1843 returns in its contemporary retelling and produces a Carol that makes the unreformed Scrooge its hero.

Dickens wrote his Christmas fantasy "to raise the Ghost of an Idea." In the century and a half since its composition that ghost has not been exorcised, and *A Christmas Carol* continues to give substance to a spirit in the Anglo-American consciousness. This protean fantasy, the culture-text of the Carol, embodies the changing realities of the times as it is re-created by each generation to articulate its cultural identity.

Edward Wagenknecht in *Dickens and the Scandalmongers* (1965) characterized as a "glaring example of critical irresponsibility" Edmund Wilson's speculation that, after Christmas, Scrooge reverts to his old self. "We cannot follow Scrooge 'beyond the frame of the story,' " Wagenknecht asserted, "for the simple reason that beyond the frame of the story he does not exist." The history of the Carol since 1843 would suggest otherwise, for Scrooge exists in the Anglo-American consciousness independent of his Dickensian origin. Dickens may have framed our thoughts and established the broad outlines of the story, but the Carol is rewritten each Christmas, and Scrooge, an altered spirit, appears anew with each retelling.

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Needs

PETER MAKUCK

One stormy night he came back
to check up,
and bring us an ice cream treat,
but sneaking in that night
through the cellar door,
he rattled chains and groaned.

The babysitter—was it Madge?—
pulled me
at the first groan from below,
toward the only door with a bolt,
the bathroom, where we cowered
listening to Frankenstein steps
louder, closer—

"Hey, it's me,"
and laughter restored
each thing to its right place
before the night took him
out again with my mother
who could only sigh
at his need for gags—
the flyaway buck, dribble glass,
fake turds on the carpet.

Ever since high school
I've enjoyed the one
where you tap the wrong shoulder

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so the person turns
to empty space,
or the face of some stranger.
I play it now on my son.

Last time
my father came to visit
I waited in the arrivals lounge
and scanned a stream of faces
each one not his
sure something dire
had happened in Newark.
Then someone taps my shoulder,
but no one's there
before I face him
in fake glasses, rubber nose, and wig.
I sighed—it's true—my mother's role
now mine.

Today I feel that tap again
and turn to the huge empty air
slowly filled
with a white wall, blank as paper,
then giggles,
and a ghost
hidden in the laugh-wrinkled
face of my son.

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The Magician

GEORGE GREENSTEIN

Anyone spending an evening with George Gamow was assured of a good time. He himself loved a good time, and he went out of his way to ensure that he had one. He made up funny poems. He drew delightful, whimsical drawings. He organized charades and skits. He waylaid people, good-looking young women in particular, to demonstrate his latest magic tricks.

Gamow began his career as a nuclear physicist, switched in mid-life to astrophysics and cosmology, and ended up working on the problem of the genetic code. Among some of his colleagues he aroused, at times, a degree of resentment. There were those who felt he did not take science seriously enough—as evidenced by the incessant playfulness, the changing of fields. But he did take science seriously. He took it with all the seriousness of a game. Gamow loved nothing so much as a good time; and science—all of it—was to him the best time of all.

Gamow delighted in telling stories. His story of his own birth goes like this: The child was too big to pass through the birth canal, and the mother's life was despaired of. Eventually the decision was made to cut the baby into manageable pieces in order to save the mother's life—a comment on the state of medical knowledge in czarist Russia, if not on a perhaps excessive tendency to embellish a tale. The storyteller—Gamow—was saved by a neighbor who had heard that a famous Moscow surgeon was vacationing nearby. After being roused out of bed in the middle of the night, the doctor performed a cesarean section on a table in the Gamows' book-lined study. That was in 1904.

Both of Gamow's parents were teachers in Odessa. One of his cousins was an astronomer who went to Italy to study with Giovanni Schiaparelli (famous for his claim to have discovered canals on Mars), but spent his time with a nihilist group instead. Eventually they attempted the assassination of Premier Piotr Stolypin. The attempt failed and the conspirators were executed, as recounted in Leonid Andreyev's famous novella *The Seven Who Were Hanged.*

When Gamow was thirteen years old the Russian Revolution broke out. Schooling during these times became sporadic at best. Odessa was often bombarded by enemy warships, and one day while Gamow sat by a window reading a book on geometry, the window was shattered by the explosion of a nearby shell. Warring factions occupied the city. Typhus and cholera were rampant. The water supply was shut off. Food supplies ran short, and in the countryside peasants hoarded what little they had.

Gamow tells in his autobiography, *My World Line,* of the mathematician Igor Tamm, who one day made his way on foot into the countryside in an attempt to gather food.

When he arrived in a neighboring village, at the period when Odessa was occupied by the Reds, and was negotiating with a villager as to how many chickens he could get for half a dozen silver spoons,

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the village was captured by one of the Makhno bands, who were roaming the country, harassing the Reds. Seeing his city clothes (or what was left of them), the capturers brought him to the Ataman, a bearded fellow in a tall black fur hat with machine-gun cartridge ribbons crossed on his broad chest and a couple of hand grenades hanging on his belt.

"You son-of-a-bitch, you Communist agitator, undermining our Mother Ukraine! The punishment is death."

"But no," answered Tamm. "I am a professor at the University of Odessa and have come here only to get some food."

"Rubbish!" retorted the leader. "What kind of professor are you?"

"I teach mathematics."

"Mathematics?" said the Ataman. "All right! Then give me an estimate of the error one makes by cutting off Maclaurin's series at the n^{th} term. Do this, and you will go free. Fail, and you will be shot!"

Tamm could not believe his ears, since this problem belongs to a rather special branch of higher mathematics. With a shaking hand, and under the muzzle of the gun, he managed to work out the solution and handed it to the Ataman.

"Correct!" said the Ataman. "Now I see that you really are a professor. Go home!"

Tamm never found out who the mysterious mathematician was.

Gamow's interests early in his life tended towards science. He was a precocious student, and while his fellow students were making their way through more prosaic topics, he studied relativity and differential equations on his own. Nor did the budding researcher neglect to further the experimental sciences. At one point his father bought him a small microscope, with which he proposed to test the validity of the Russian Orthodox dogma. Dashing home from Communion one day with a bit of transubstantiated bread tucked away in his cheek, he compared it to a similar crumb from his kitchen dipped in wine beforehand.

Gamow spent a year at the university in Odessa and then transferred to Leningrad. But amid all the uproar of the revolution, schooling was erratic. Furthermore, he found that he knew more about some subjects than his teachers. "It was somehow immaterial," he later related. "I was around the university, I was not in the university. I was registered. I was getting credits, but in most cases not attending lectures." He began work in experimental physics (primarily because experimentalists were given a convenient place to hang their coats) but soon found his forte to be theory. He took an adviser, who assigned him a research problem. But Gamow found the problem sterile and uninteresting. His attention kept wandering.

A photograph of Gamow survives from his student days. A group of students and faculty is posing about a visiting scientist. Gamow is the only one not wearing a coat and tie. His face is large, his gaze intense—he seems to be glowering at the camera. Although he is standing towards the rear of the group, his image leaps off the page: a powerful presence.

In 1928, he was given the chance to leave Russia and spend the summer at the university in Göttingen. It was a happy chance for someone from the relatively sleepy backwater of Russia because in those days Göttingen was one of the world centers of physics. There, one afternoon, sitting in the university library and leafing through the pages of a physics journal, Gamow happened across a paper by the great British physicist Ernest Rutherford. In his paper Rutherford was discussing the phenomenon of radioactivity, the emission of particles by unstable atomic nuclei. Rutherford's point was that, by every known principle of physics, radioactivity ought never to occur. Nuclear constituents were known to be maintained within their nuclei by attractive forces, forces so powerful as to make escape impossible. An analogy would be that of a prisoner trapped within a cell.

Rutherford in his paper was proposing a means whereby such a prisoner might worm his way out under certain circumstances. The proposal, however, did not appeal to Gamow. It struck him as contrived and artificial. But, as he sat there, the correct explanation came to him. It came in an instant, and within a matter of days he had worked out all the details.

It was the first major discovery of Gamow's career, and it was in many ways a remarkable triumph. His theory accounted for essentially every detail of the process of radioactivity, and this in spite of the fact that nuclear physics was in its infancy in 1928—people did not even know of the neutron, one of the two particles of which nuclei are constructed. Gamow's theory, in fact, was the first rigorous treatment of any nuclear process ever to be proposed. It transformed nuclear physics from its initial fumbling and imprecise state into a modern, quantitative field of study.

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Most remarkable of all was the nature of Gamow's account of radioactivity. For in his paper, he makes not the slightest attempt to explain how the escaping particle performs its Houdini-like trick. In his paper he is hardly concerned with particles at all. He is instead concerned with waves. These were the new, radically incomprehensible waves of quantum theory. Quantum mechanics is one of the dominating theories of our age. There is hardly a single facet of physical science that it has not transformed. The theory was developed in a monumental debate extending over the first quarter of the century, culminating in the proposal by the French physicist Louis de Broglie that to every subatomic particle there was associated a wave. Shortly thereafter, the Austrian physicist Erwin Schrödinger wrote down an equation governing the propagation of these waves. With the formulation of this equation, the theory was essentially complete, and the debate came to a close.

But the debate on the interpretation of quantum mechanics has continued to this day. The theory is profoundly mysterious. It gives a detailed set of instructions for calculating subatomic processes, while at the same time failing to provide the slightest comprehension of how these processes take place. Indeed, it seems to deny the very possibility that such a comprehension can ever be reached. So enigmatic are the theory's implications that the late physicist Richard Feynman once commented, "I think I can safely say that nobody understands quantum mechanics." Another physicist has put things more succinctly: "Quantum theory is magic."

The de Broglie waves that quantum mechanics treats possess a curious combination of existence and non-existence. On the one hand, they exhibit some degree of hard, physical reality in that they are influenced by external circumstances, curling around obstacles, passing through holes in walls, and the like. But they cannot possibly represent a real physical vibration: among other things their strengths are sometimes imaginary—the square root of a negative number. It is the subatomic particles that are real, not the waves that accompany them.

The connection between wave and particle is that the wave's square (reversed in sign if negative) gives the probability of finding the particle. Gamow applied this prescription to escape from a radioactive atomic nucleus. The particle imprisoned within the "cell" has an associated wave that exhibits troughs and crests, and that implies that it can be located anywhere within the enclosure. Into the solid rock comprising the walls of the cell the particle is forbidden to penetrate, but the Schrödinger wave does (although Gamow found that rather than exhibiting normal form within this region it smoothly decreases). Finally, in the region outside the prison, the wave resumes normal form, though greatly diminished by its passage through the wall. The reduced strength corresponds to a small probability of finding the particle. But, while small, the probability is not zero: there is a definite chance of the particle's escaping from the nucleus and flying away into space.

As worked out by Gamow, this is what quantum theory says of the process of radioactivity. This is *all* that it says. Notice the fundamentally incomplete nature of its account. In a very important sense, the theory entirely fails to describe what happened. For, after all, how did the prisoner do it? There was no crack in the walls through which he managed to worm his way. Nor was there some pliant guard about, available to be bribed. Nothing in the quantum-mechanical theory of radioactivity explains how a subatomic particle performs its magic, and makes its way through impenetrable walls.

Most people would say that science is the effort to comprehend the natural world. But quantum mechanics has turned this view on its head. Rutherford sought to understand radioactivity by proposing a detailed mechanism whereby the process takes place, and in this effort he failed. Gamow succeeded, succeeded even as he sat reading Rutherford's paper, because he did *not* seek understanding. Rather he was thinking only about the remarkable formalism of quantum mechanics. He was content with magic.

Gamow's schooling did not so much end as fizzle away. He lost interest in his Ph.D. thesis research and sent the University of Leningrad his work on radioactivity instead. It seems that they never got around to awarding him a degree.

As so often happens in such matters, he was not the only one to have thought of the penetration of barriers by quantum waves. Two Princeton University physicists, Edward Condon and Ronald Gurney, did much the same work and published it at much the same time.

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But news of the competition did not reach Russia, and when he returned home, Gamow found himself something of a hero. "A son of the working class has explained the tiniest piece of machinery in the world," extolled one newspaper, and *Pravda* went so far as to print a poem in his honor:

> . . . Why, this working-class bumpkin,
> this dimwit, this Gyorgy
> Anton'ich called Geo.,
> He went and caught up with the atom
> and kicked it about like a pro . . .

The son of the working class was given permission to travel abroad yet again. He spent time at Rutherford's laboratory in Cambridge and at an institute in Copenhagen. But, upon returning home in 1931, Gamow found the political situation dramatically altered. Previously the government, aware of the relatively backward state of Russia as compared to Europe, had taken pride in Russian scientists who were invited abroad; now, however, science had become just one more arena in which the battle against capitalism was to be waged. The era of state control of science had begun in earnest.

Nearly everyone now knows of the perversion of Russian biology by dialectical materialism. That field was crippled for decades by Lysenkoism. Physics, too, had its share of problems. For some strange reason, the quantum-mechanical uncertainty principle was decreed contrary to dialectical materialism, and once while giving a public lecture Gamow was forcibly interrupted by a government philosopher when he brought it up. The audience was dismissed, and Gamow was instructed to refrain from mentioning the principle ever again. Einstein's theory of relativity, too, was decreed invalid. With time these prohibitions were lifted, and by now some of the best work in physics is done by the Soviets. But the pervasive influence of state philosophy persisted for decades.

Once, when I was in graduate school and studying Einstein's theory, I had occasion to consult a monograph on relativity written by the Russian physicist Fock. The book was the typical maze of equations and abstruse symbols one expects of an advanced work in physics, and it was obvious that the author had not the slightest interest in Marxist philosophy. Nevertheless, the subject was mentioned—once, at the very close of Fock's introduction, in a paragraph that stuck out like a sore thumb and four missing fingers. There the author explained that it was only through the writings of Lenin that he came to a proper understanding of relativity, and only through the study of dialectical materialism that he reached a proper comprehension of the discoveries that he himself had made. This silly apologia had obviously been inserted at the last minute on the insistence of some government official.

Gamow found himself trapped in a deteriorating situation. He was denied permission to attend an important conference in Rome in 1931, and the intrusion of state censors became daily more restrictive. It was difficult for Gamow to support himself. Pay scales were so low that he was forced to take five different jobs. Most of Gamow's time was spent waiting in line at cashiers' desks. The rest of his time was spent planning an escape.

The story of Gamow's departure from Russia reads like a paperback thriller written by someone in an ironical frame of mind. He and his wife pored over maps. Their attention was drawn by a stretch of the Black Sea leading from the Crimean peninsula south to Turkey. They purchased a frail, collapsible canoe and hoarded food for months. They managed to wangle permission to vacation at a resort on the shores of the Black Sea. There one morning they paddled off, telling their fellow vacationers that they were planning a trip to a local observatory. But once out of sight of shore, they turned due south and commenced paddling across the 170 miles of open sea.

Forty-eight hours later they ended up not far from where they had started: cramped, cold, hungry, and exhausted. They had been thwarted by a windstorm and had narrowly escaped with their lives. Once back home in Leningrad, they turned their attention to the border with Norway. An oceanographic laboratory had been set up not far from Murmansk. There they made several forays to scout the chances of a second attempt, but found the Soviet navy present in force. They returned home once more.

A few days later, Gamow received a letter officially *instructing* him to attend a conference in Brussels. His passport, visas, and rail ticket were to be provided by the Soviet government. That was in the fall of 1933. Gamow and his wife departed for Brussels

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and never went back. The only item of note that occurred at the conference that got them out of Russia was a major revolt during his talk, in which both French and non-French physicists demanded that he cease attempting to speak French. Within a year he had obtained an appointment at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. Upon hearing of this appointment, he, a newcomer to American geography, bought a ticket to Seattle.

Gamow's work is marked by a remarkable inventiveness and originality. In each of the disciplines in which he worked, he imposed his own special stamp. Most scientific papers break little new ground and are chiefly concerned with cleaning up one or another messy detail. But, in Gamow's writings, one finds insight upon insight, particularly in his shorter papers.

These papers are a pleasure to read. While many are heavily technical, others contain not a single equation or mathematical symbol. These are unusually short—often a mere three or four paragraphs—and they are marked by an intense compression of thought. Every sentence says something new. It is a style much in favor among scientists, who could never be accused of garrulity in their scientific communications. But my own impression is that Gamow developed the style to an unusual degree. He published papers in German, French, and English, but never, curiously enough, in his native Russian.

Gamow's technical abilities were great, but he had little interest in technique for its own sake. He was happier when establishing the broad outlines of a subject than when working out all the details. He preferred fields that were new and unexplored, in which surprises awaited the traveler at every turn. It was this predilection that in Göttingen had led him to apply quantum theory to a problem involving nuclei, while everybody else was busy applying it to atoms and molecules and earning Nobel prizes in the process. But by the mid-1930s, nuclear physics, which he had helped establish, was becoming too well-established for his liking. He moved into astrophysics. There his most significant contribution dealt with Einstein's so-called big bang cosmology. It was a contribution that, as usual, carried with it Gamow's own imprint, and it radically altered the very nature of the field.

The mathematics in which Einstein's theory is couched is extraordinarily abstruse, and it is unusually difficult to work with. The theory is so technically complex that many of its most significant features remained undiscovered for decades. To this day, after three-quarters of a century of effort, research continues on the task of discovering just what Einstein's theory predicts. This work is mathematical, abstract, and far removed from physical reality. At the same time, dealing as it does with the nature of space and time, with the expansion of the cosmos and its overall geometry, and with the very creation of the universe, the big bang theory generated much work that is purely philosophical in tone. This subsequent work, too, is abstract and far removed from reality.

But Gamow avoided all the mathematical complexities and the abstract philosophical implications. The approach he took could almost be termed pedestrian, had it not turned out to be so fruitful. He treated the big bang as a physical event that had actually occurred—an extraordinary event to be sure, but one not fundamentally different from any other. He investigated that event's consequences. He asked if any of these consequences still remained. In this he was, if you will, doing a sort of cosmic archaeology: looking about for traces of creation.

The Milky Way Galaxy in which the Earth is situated is a stupendous disk-shaped aggregation of some one hundred billion stars. The Milky Way, easily visible on clear moonless nights, is that disk seen edge-on. Also visible to the naked eye, though with greater difficulty, are a few dozen other galaxies; astronomical photographs reveal myriads more. So far as we can tell, the space between galaxies is largely empty: they seem to be the fundamental units into which moons, stars, and planets are organized.

Galaxies are regions into which the material of the universe has been concentrated. They are knots, condensations in its overall structure. In collaboration with the physicist Edward Teller, Gamow asked how these condensations might have formed. According to Einstein's scenario, the universe originated in a dense, superheated big bang and then commenced expanding and cooling. It occurred to Gamow and Teller that, in such an expansion, a stage must have been reached in which the universe as a whole was just as dense as galaxies are today. They argued that this epoch most likely marked the point at which

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these structures formed. Gamow and Teller identified various processes that might have intervened at this stage to cause the expanding debris to coagulate into a multitude of sub-units, later to become galaxies.

The scenario they proposed forms the basis for present-day thinking: galaxies are relics of the big bang. In related work, Gamow and his students asked whether nuclear reactions in the early universe might have synthesized all the chemical elements we find today, and whether the blaze of light accompanying our creation might still remain and be detected.

Gamow was exuberant, jovial, rough, and friendly. He was six feet, six inches tall; skinny in his youth, he weighed 250 pounds towards the end of his life. (Remarkably enough for such a huge person, his voice was unusually high-pitched.) He had a large face, prominent ears, and intensely blond hair. He had an immensity of personality, and was the sort of person who seemed to fill the room. His memory seemed limitless; he would quote poetry by the hour.

Gamow's capacity for alcohol was equally limitless. He drank incessantly and hugely. Something of a mystery surrounds this aspect of his life. It is widely believed that his last days were poisoned by alcoholism, but I have been told by several colleagues who knew him personally that the belief is false and that no matter how much he drank he never lost control. At any rate, it is clear that towards the end of Gamow's life, the habit returned to haunt him. His last years were spent in an almost perpetual state of illness, many of his problems apparently related to his lifelong consumption of alcohol. He died at the relatively early age of sixty-four.

Fascinated by magic tricks, Gamow worked hard to perfect them. He loved nothing so much as a good joke. He would organize skits in which prominent physicists and their theories made thinly disguised appearances. He wrote a parody of the book of Genesis in which the cosmogenic theories of a colleague were lampooned. He built little Rube Goldberg gadgets, replete with drawings and legends in several languages, in which grand scientific principles were illustrated. These things would never actually work—they were made of plywood and string. But their actual working was not the point; the point was the pleasure of it all.

Gamow began one technical paper with a quote from *Alice in Wonderland*. His notebooks and letters to colleagues were filled with silly rhymes and playful drawings. They were written in a handwriting that was huge, chaotic, and sprawling, and these writings all bounced madly from subject to subject. His spelling was an amazement.

Unlike many scientists, Gamow wrote for the public, and he did so prolifically. His books are classics of their genre, and they move from mathematics to physics to astronomy to biology with gracious ease; this from a man who did not speak English until he was in his twenties. Perhaps his most famous writings are the Mr. Tompkins stories. Mr. Tompkins (his full name was C. G. H. Tompkins, "c" being the mathematical symbol for the speed of light, "G" that for Newton's constant of gravitation, and "h" Planck's constant—more fooling around) was a bank teller whose father-in-law was a professor of physics. Tompkins had a habit of falling asleep at the old man's lectures and falling into a dream, and in these dreams he would encounter the very things the professor was explaining. In one book the speed of light was reduced to a mere few miles per hour, and while driving in a car, Tompkins would directly experience relativity's many strange phenomena. The dreams are a wonderful literary device, and they render the most abstruse of subjects easily and vividly comprehensible.

Generations of physicists, myself included, recall reading Gamow's books as youngsters with fondness and delight. They have the same easy, cheerful style that animated his conversation. Some books explicating science for the layman strike a tone of high seriousness, not to say mysticism; but Gamow's style was that of the storyteller, the man who has just learned something extraordinary, something fascinating, and who cannot wait to tell it to you.

In the summer of 1953, a colleague showed Gamow something wonderful. It was Watson and Crick's just-published paper elucidating the structure of the DNA molecule, and the event marked yet another transition in Gamow's career: out of astrophysics and into biochemistry. He was nearly fifty years old at the time.

Gamow's curiosity had been aroused by the problem of the genetic code. By 1953 it was known that the nature of every organism was controlled by the blueprint contained within

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its DNA. But it was also known that this control was not exerted directly. There was an intermediate step: the synthesis of a set of enzymes, which migrated outwards from the DNA to catalyze the biochemical reactions taking place throughout the cell. The problem of the genetic code was the problem of how the blueprint contained in the DNA carried over into the second blueprint contained in the enzymes.

Enzymes were long chains composed of amino acids, of which there were twenty different sorts. The famous achievement of Watson and Crick was the unraveling of the analogous structure of DNA. Each strand of their double helix was a chain of nucleotides, of which there were but four: adenine, thymine, guanine, and cytosine. The patterns running down the two strands differed. But they were not independent, for there was a rule of association: wherever adenine appeared on one strand, thymine appeared across from it on the other; and wherever cytosine appeared on one, guanine appeared on the other.

Biochemistry was, and is, a subject of fearsome complexity. But Gamow in his original paper on the genetic code paid not the slightest attention to any of its details. Rather he concentrated on its most general, abstract features. In that paper he described DNA as "a long number written in a four-digital system," referring to the four nucleotides of which it was composed; and enzymes with their twenty amino acids as "long 'words' based on a 20-letter alphabet." In so doing he was putting his own, peculiarly individual stamp on the field; the very language in which he was speaking was uniquely his own.

In Gamow's language the problem of the genetic code was one of translation. How could something written in a four-symbol code be translated into a twenty-symbol code? Phrased in this way, the question could be tackled entirely apart from the many details of biochemistry—details that in Gamow's view merely obscured its essential points. To him the question was in fact utterly abstract, and the tack he took in looking for a solution was similarly abstract. He tried some guesses for the nature of the translation system. The simplest would be that each "number" along the DNA strand determined a corresponding "letter" along the enzyme strand. But this would not do, for as there were only four separate numbers, enzymes would be composed of only four separate letters. A second possibility was that each pair of numbers determined each letter, but this would allow for only sixteen amino acids; and a system in which letters were determined by triplets of numbers turned out to allow not too few amino acids but too many.

It's a pretty problem, and Gamow's proposed solution was equally pretty. He considered the nucleotides, sitting at two points on one strand of DNA and two on the other, the points chosen to form the pattern of a rhombus. He figured that the hole at the center of a rhombus defined by four particular nucleotides would have a shape differing from that formed by any other four. His proposal was that each amino acid would be coded for by that shape. Perhaps the amino acids actually got stuck in the holes and then were strung together like beads on a string to form the enzyme. In any event, because one of the nucleotides of the rhombus was not random, but was determined through the rule of association by the nucleotide sitting across from it, it turned out that *there were exactly twenty different possible rhombuses.*

The delightful thing about Gamow's proposal is how it unites what appear to be unrelated, disparate elements. Twenty amino acids, four nucleotides, and a peculiar rule of association: suddenly everything falls into a comprehensible order, and a four-digital system translates into a twenty-letter alphabet by an inescapable logic. It is a proposal of simplicity, elegance, and beauty—always, in science, the hallmark of a good explanation.

Unfortunately for the storyteller's art, Gamow's proposal turned out to be wrong. It required more than a decade and the efforts of biochemists the world over to establish the correct answer. The true genetic code is complex, and it involves many of the messy details that Gamow had hoped to avoid. To me, at least, the true code is less elegant, less beautiful than his proposal. And I feel confident that he was led to his proposal by just such aesthetic considerations. For in theoretical physics, the explanation that is elegant, that has the greatest degree of mathematical beauty, often turns out to be correct. But this seems not to be the case in biology.

In an age of specialization, Gamow was a generalist. All of science was his province. Furthermore, the very style of his work kept changing. He made no attempt to come to

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what we normally think of as an intuitive understanding of radioactivity, contenting himself rather with developing a theory based on the magical formalism of quantum mechanics. His work on cosmology, on the other hand, was wholly an effort to develop a physical comprehension; avoiding philosophical speculation and mathematical formalism, he worked to comprehend the big bang in all its details. In his biological studies his role was that of the puzzle solver (one of his popular books was on puzzles), and he focused attention on the abstract, mathematical aspects of the problem of the genetic code.

Common to all of Gamow's work are the qualities of playfulness and inventiveness, and a resolute refusal to be trapped within a ponderous consistency. The gleam I imagine in his eye as he worked out the solution to a scientific problem is the same gleam I see as he recited the poetry of Pushkin by the hour or demonstrated to an impromptu audience some new and ingenious trick of magic. Towards the end of his life, recalling his perilous flight across the Black Sea in a frail canoe, one particular image stood out in his recollections: that of a porpoise he had glimpsed, momentarily suspended in a wave illuminated by the setting sun. How Gamow-like!

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The Subversive George Gissing

EVELYN TOYNTON

Toward the end of his life, after prodigious labor and hardship, George Gissing (1857–1903) finally achieved recognition as a major English novelist. If the twenty-three passionately gloomy novels he produced never earned him more than a very modest living, at least he had the satisfaction of seeing his name linked with those of Meredith and Hardy as one of the leading writers of his day. Even the imperious Henry James expressed approval for Gissing's portrayal of refined souls at odds with brutal circumstances.

But the bubble reputation was for Gissing even more fragile than usual. By the 1920s he had been firmly relegated to the status of minor novelist. Nowadays surveys of the English novel may cite him in passing as his country's chief practitioner of naturalistic fiction—a dubious distinction at best—before moving on to Hardy, while college literature courses rarely touch on Gissing at all. The average literate person will know the name but not necessarily the books behind it.

Why this neglect of someone whose importance is proclaimed by such dissimilar writers as Henry James and George Orwell (an avid forager in second-hand bookshops for Gissing's out-of-print works)? The answer may lie partly in the unrelenting pessimism that characterizes Gissing's novels. Hardy is just as doubtful about the prospects for human happiness, but his is a pastoral gloom, more palatable to the average reader—particularly, perhaps, the modern city dweller—than the cramped urban misery that Gissing depicts. Then, too, Hardy's stories and characters are consciously mythic, partaking of spiritual grandeur and the mysteries of fate. Gissing's novels have very different virtues. Chief among them is the sense that an honest man is speaking to us, that things happen in his books exactly as they do in the world.

In fact, Gissing's talents, like Orwell's, might have been more suited to essays than to fiction. The greatest pleasure to be derived from reading him is an intellectual one—that of watching a fiercely independent mind in the act of reflecting on life. The view of the world presented in his books is never either falsely romantic or programmatically simple. Even Gissing's relationship to the reader seems exceptionally honest. He may bully us at times, backing us into a corner from which it is impossible to resist his view of the world any longer, but he never manipulates us as, say, Dickens does, never sentimentalizes poverty or the poor. Whereas Dickens's blameless chimney sweeps are wholly satisfying to read about but never truly plausible, Gissing's clear-sighted descriptions of how poverty erodes the spirit *are* plausible, and discomforting precisely because of that. "No one can embrace Orwell's works who hopes for ease," wrote E. M. Forster, and the same could certainly be said of the works of George Gissing.

Sometimes, of course, fidelity to grim truth means sacrificing the more traditional pleasures of fiction. Gissing never makes his characters "larger than life," never uses them to give us glimpses of the ineluctable mysteries at the heart of existence. His prose can be flat-footed and pedestrian at times, so that he seems to be reporting from the trenches rather than creating a fictional world. This leads to the impression that he is writing strict autobiography in the guise of fiction. Virginia Woolf, in an essay full of delicate condescension, called him "one of those imperfect novelists through whose books one sees the life of the

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author faintly covered by the lives of fictitious people."

It might be more accurate to say that the prevailing themes of Gissing's books are his own obsessive preoccupations, born of a life of grinding poverty and loneliness. A morbidly sensitive man incapable of either promoting his material well-being or coping efficiently with practical necessity, Gissing seems to have lived until middle age in a state of perpetual misery and indignation, finding solace only in his beloved Greek poets. Too ashamed of his poverty to ask any educated woman to share it with him, he entered into two awful marriages with uneducated and seemingly mentally unbalanced working-class women, whom he came to regard more as tormentors than companions. It is no wonder that he is so insistent, in his novels, on how the lack of money affects every aspect of existence, repeatedly portraying the anguish of those who want to do something fine but instead must struggle merely to survive—people of refinement and intellect debarred by poverty and disadvantage from intercourse with their own kind.

But Gissing was also capable of original reflection on the larger issues of his day and of insight into circumstances very different from his own. And he depicts a much broader range of characters than Virginia Woolf 's comment suggests. Gissing's novel *The Odd Women*, for example, is a remarkably sympathetic, complex portrait of the "women's movement" of the late nineteenth century, an accomplishment particularly impressive for a writer who can sometimes appear downright misogynistic. Everything the novel's valiant feminists say about the need to train women for useful work is brought forcefully home through Gissing's portrait of a group of impoverished, genteel sisters who, when they are suddenly orphaned, are totally unprepared to make their way in the world. The youngest and prettiest sister, after a backbreaking stint as a shop assistant, enters into a loveless marriage with a drearily respectable, insanely jealous domestic tyrant. The other sisters, not fetching enough to attract husbands, settle for precarious and humiliating positions as companions and governesses. In between posts they starve meekly in shabby, cramped lodgings in London, where the most sensitive of them seeks consolation in furtive gin drinking. It is a frightening picture of wasted lives, more powerful because it is hard to see what recourse was open to these "nice" women deprived of the protection of a man.

Interestingly, the male characters in *The Odd Women* are much less sympathetic. Apart from the stiflingly possessive husband, there is a charming dilettante and freethinker who courts the leader of the feminists out of little more than idle curiosity and the desire to see her abandon her cause for him. It is a rare indictment by a male writer of the egotism of his sex.

Not that Gissing is wholly without empathy for these men. In fact, it is a hallmark of his fiction that he never presents us with out-and-out villains, even when dealing with characters who drastically hurt others. In *New Grub Street*, for example, that ultimate depiction of the horrors of the literary life, the main character, the novelist Edwin Reardon, is effectually ruined by the failure of his pretentious, social-climbing wife to accept poverty with him. She hounds him to write more and worse books until his frail talent is destroyed. At the same time, Marion Yule, the most likable female character in the novel, is callously jilted by the ambitious man of letters Jasper Milvain when the small inheritance she was expecting falls through. In the end, Reardon dies and Marion takes a job as a provincial librarian to support her blind father; Amy Reardon and Milvain marry after Amy comes into some money. But neither Amy nor Milvain is presented as a monster. They are merely ordinary, selfish, robust creatures, capable of kindness if not of self-sacrifice. As Milvain himself says, "Poverty and struggle would have made me a detestable creature. As it is, I am not such a bad fellow. . . . Trust me, there's many a man who would like to be generous, but is made despicably mean by necessity." Gissing clearly prefers Reardon, whose passion for the classics and inconvenient integrity so resemble his own, but he does not idealize him, just as he does not exaggerate Milvain's faults. Reardon's prickly sensitivity and pride, his undignified need for reassurance, his paralysis when action is called for—these things make it possible for the reader to understand Amy's impatience with him.

The one really saintly character in *New Grub Street* is Harold Biffen, Reardon's fel-

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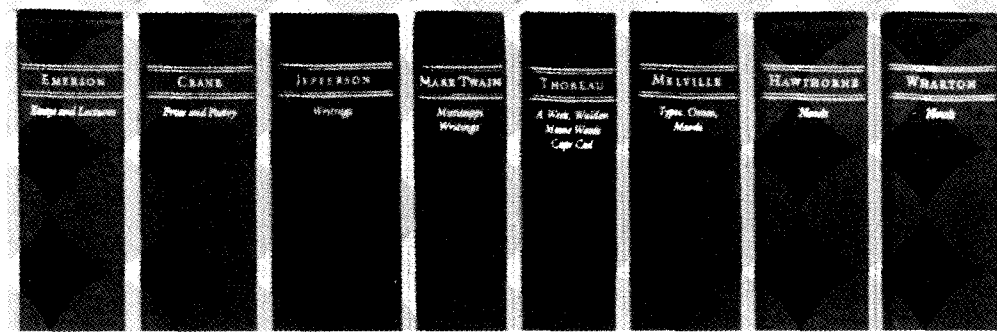

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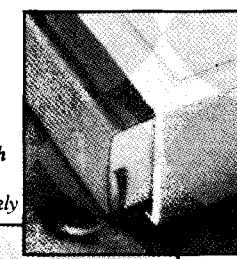

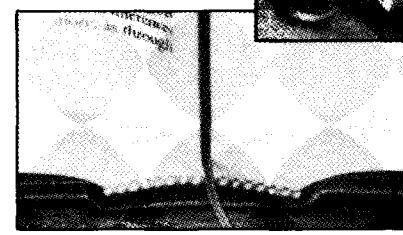

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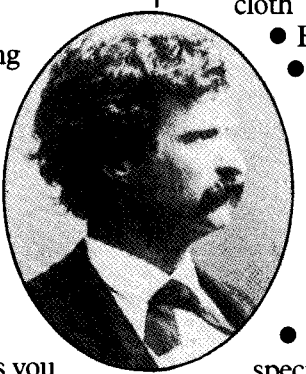

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low novelist and one friend. Immeasurably poorer even than Reardon, Biffen dines on bread and dripping in his cold attic while discoursing rapturously on the strophes of Euripides. Only after Reardon's death do his mute love for his friend's widow and the knowledge that his loneliness can have no end finally prove too much for him:

> He could not bear to walk the streets where the faces of beautiful women would encounter him. When he must needs leave the house, he went about in the poor, narrow ways, where only spectacles of coarseness, and want, and toil would be presented to him. Yet even here he was too often reminded that the poverty-stricken of the class to which poverty is natural were not condemned to endure in solitude. Only he who belonged to no class, who was rejected alike by his fellows in privation and by his equals in intellect, must die without having known the touch of a loving woman's hand.

After righting an upside-down book on his shelves and aligning the pen and ink on his desk, Biffen goes out to Primrose Hill to kill himself, in order to spare his landlady the shock of finding his body.

One of the things for which the tough-minded Orwell praised Gissing ("I am ready to maintain that England has produced very few better novelists . . . he does not commit the faults that really matter") was his interest in the "pressure of circumstance on character," which Orwell, of course, shared. There are other similarities between the two. Like Orwell, Gissing refused to embrace any political orthodoxy. He did not believe that because one form of government was flawed its diametrical opposite would necessarily work better. Although he criticized the class system for inflicting so much needless suffering, Gissing could not embrace the socialist movement that proposed to set matters right—perhaps because, even more than injustice, he disliked the utilitarian spirit that saw no use for things like Greek poetry. "To flatter the proletariat," says a character in *Born in Exile*, "is to fight against all the good that still characterizes educated England—against reverence for the beautiful, against enthusiasm of mind, heart, and soul . . . it is the few, the very few, that have always kept alive whatever of effectual good we see in the human race."

Demos, the most powerful expression of Gissing's skepticism about reformers, is the tale of Richard Mutimer, a working-class socialist who comes into an unexpected fortune and decides to create a Utopian industrial community on the country estate he has inherited. Gissing's reservations about this character and his grandiose plans are eloquently conveyed in his catalogue of Mutimer's library:

> . . . a large collection of pamphlets, titled wonderfully and of yet more remarkable contents, the authoritative utterances of contemporary gentlemen—and ladies—who made it the end of their existence to prove . . . that the begetting of children is a most deplorable oversight; that to eat flesh is wholly unworthy of a civilised being; that if every man and woman performed their quota of the world's labour, it would be necessary to work for one hour and thirty-seven minutes daily, no jot longer, and that the author, in each case, is the one person capable of restoring dignity to a downtrodden race and happiness to a blasted universe. Alas, alas! On this food had Richard Mutimer pastured his soul since he grew to manhood, on this and this only. English literature was to him a sealed volume; poetry he scarcely knew by name; of history he was worse than ignorant, having looked at this period and that through distorting media . . . the bent of his mind would have led him to natural science, but opportunities of instruction were lacking, and the chosen directors of his prejudice taught him to regard every fact, every discovery, as *for* or *against* something.
>
> A library of pathetic significance, the individual alone considered. Viewed as representative, not without alarming suggestiveness to those who any longer trouble themselves about the world's future.

When Mutimer's scheme for his laboring community (in which he himself will not toil) calls for polluting the beautiful valley around the manor house with myriad smokestacks, it is obvious that Gissing's sympathies are with Hubert Eldon, the educated aesthete who expected to come into the estate and who is horrified at the destruction of the countryside.

The clash between Mutimer's and Eldon's points of view is played out on the battlefield of Adela, a pure-hearted, refined young woman (a recurring type in Gissing's novels) who loves Eldon but whose grasping mother bullies her into marrying Mutimer. She tries valiantly to believe in her husband's good

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intentions, even as he becomes increasingly autocratic and corrupt, and to embrace the socialist cause, which in the abstract she feels must be right. But, after living among the working class, she finds she can no longer agree with the sentiments of the wealthy liberals who like to eulogize them. Instead, she wants to cry out, "It is a mistake! They have not these feelings you attribute to them. Such suffering as you picture them enduring comes only of the poetry-fed soul at issue with fate." This is of course Gissing's own view.

Yet Gissing is also capable of compassion for those whose claims to conscious suffering he seems to refute. Elsewhere in *Demos*, a graveyard for the London poor elicits this elegy:

> Here lie those who were born for toil; who, when toil has worn them to the uttermost, have but to yield their useless breath and pass into oblivion. For them no aspiration; for them no hope of memory in the dust; their very children are wearied into forgetfulness. Indistinguishable units in the throng that labours but to support life, the name of each, father, mother, child, is as a dumb cry for the warmth and love of which Fate so stinted them.

If Gissing does not wholeheartedly take up their cause, in *Demos* or elsewhere, it is because he had come to believe that, in any social order, one person's happiness must always be bought at the expense of someone else's misery. While he feels for those who suffer like dumb animals, he is afraid that any system that concerns itself primarily with their well-being will only increase the misery of the "poetry-fed soul(s)" who claim his first allegiance.

By the same token, when Mutimer, having lost his inheritance, is killed by rioting laborers, Gissing expresses not regret but relief: Adela is now freed at last from the torments of their marriage. "Their life of union was a mockery; their married intimacy was an unnatural horror. He was not of her class, not of her world; only by violent wrenching of the laws of nature had they come together." Yet it is the friction between their incompatible sensibilities, as much as any external event, that serves to move the story along. That, too, is typical of Gissing's novels.

The "exogamous" marriage—that is, the union with someone of another class—was a subject on which Gissing could speak with some authority. At eighteen, while a scholarship student at Owens College in Manchester, he fell in love with Nell Harrison, a young prostitute. Determined to rescue her from the streets, and having conceived a plan of making her a seamstress, he began stealing from the more prosperous students in order to buy her a sewing machine. When the college authorities caught him in the act, he was expelled, prosecuted, and sentenced to one month of hard labor—an experience that, significantly, never appeared in his fiction. Of course, it ended his academic career; the full scholarship he had won to study classical languages at the University of London the following year was also rescinded.

Once out of jail, Gissing went to America, perhaps because his respectable widowed mother and less brilliant siblings could not bear to have him return in disgrace to the small Yorkshire town where he had grown up. Presumably, too, they hoped that he would make his fortune in the New World. Instead he nearly starved. In Chicago he fended off complete destitution by selling some short stories to a kindly newspaper editor—stories he wrote in the public lounge of his seedy hotel, there being no heat in the bedrooms.

Finally he managed to earn his passage back to England, where he again took up with Nell, who was now an alcoholic as well as a prostitute. In late 1879 they were married, Gissing already having written a strangely prophetic account of a catastrophic marriage between two people closely resembling himself and Nell in his first novel, *Workers in the Dawn*, a book completed before their marriage but not published until 1880.

Because her husband could not or would not supply her with money for drink, Nell periodically went back on the streets. Returning home, she would shriek abuse and insult the few friends Gissing had, if he was foolish enough to invite them to their lodgings. The closest of these friends was a young German, Eduard Bertz, a fellow lover of the classics and someone with whom Gissing was to correspond throughout his life. The affectionate conversations between Reardon and Biffen in *New Grub Street* about their unfitness for life and the glories of Greek poetry are probably based on memories of evenings with Bertz when the two young men first knew each

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other in London. But such peaceful times were rare. When not battling with Nell, Gissing was eking out a miserable living giving Greek and Latin lessons and writing short stories about working-class life.

In 1884, Gissing published a second novel, *The Unclassed*, which is already less sanguine about the possibilities for social change than *Workers in the Dawn*. For the rest of the 1880s Gissing produced one or two three-volume novels a year, despite many blocked periods and various discarded beginnings. Of the novels he finished, only *Demos* (1886), whose publication coincided with the outbreak of Socialist riots in London, sold more than a few hundred copies.

By 1884, Gissing had separated permanently from Nell, though he continued to support her until her death, in 1888, of syphillis, alcoholism, cold, and hunger. In his diary, he made the following entry:

> On a door hung a poor miserable dress and a worn out ulster. . . . Linen she had none; the very covering of the bed had gone save one sheet and one blanket. I found a number of pawn tickets, showing that she had pledged these things during last summer—when it was warm, poor creature! All the money she received went in drink. . . . I drew out the drawers. In one I found a little bit of butter and a crust of bread—most pitiful sight my eyes ever looked upon. . . . I found all my letters, away back to the American time. . . . As I stood before that bed, I felt that my life had a firmer purpose. Henceforth I shall never cease to bear testimony against the accursed social order that brings about things of this kind. . . . Poor, poor thing!

By 1890 loneliness and sexual frustration had driven him to desperation. He noted in his diary, "Feel like a madman at times. I know that I shall never do any more good work till I am married." That year he entered into a liaison with Edith Underwood, yet another uneducated working-class woman, whom he married early in 1891, apparently in the belief, as he wrote to Bertz, that she was "peculiarly gentle and pliable, with a certain natural refinement which seems to promise that she might be trained to my kind of life."

If anything, his second marriage was an even greater mistake than the first. Edith, too, proved fond of drink and quarreling, and, once ensconced with her husband in various London suburbs, would throw things at both Gissing and a succession of maids. The situation was further complicated by the birth of two sons—one in December 1891, the second in 1896. Edith was unable to take care of either the house or the children, and since servants never remained in her employ for long, much of the burden fell on Gissing himself. When not tending to the household, he wrote frantically to support them all. By the time their second son was born, after several trial separations and reconciliations, it was clear the marriage could not last.

In 1897, after sneaking his elder son off to Yorkshire to attend the school his spinster sisters had started, Gissing went into hiding to escape Edith's wrath, having arranged beforehand to get money to her through a third party. He made one clumsy effort to bribe Edith to give up their younger boy, but never tried to see the child again. In 1902, after being evicted from several residences for assaulting her landladies, Edith was committed to the county asylum. The little boy was then placed with a farm family in Cornwall.

If Gissing had married only one totally unsuitable working-class woman, the union with Nell might seem like simply an unfortunate mistake, the result of youthful infatuation and a desire to rescue a lost soul. The fact that his two marriages were disastrous in such similar ways looks a little pathological. Shortly before meeting Edith, he had written to Bertz, "Educated English girls will not face poverty in marriage, and to them anything under 400 pounds a year is serious poverty. . . . There is *no* real hope of my ever marrying anyone of a better kind." But this argument, elaborately presented in several of his novels, is not wholly convincing. Gissing appears to have been not only physically attractive but—by many accounts—charming, and by 1890 he had a certain literary reputation. Surely some "nice" middle-class woman who admired his books (and perhaps had a little money of her own) would have married him.

One is forced to the conclusion that he preferred marrying Edith to trying to find someone more suitable. The reasons for this can only be guessed at. Certainly he was a shy man, and he was probably ashamed of his criminal past, such as it was; then again, he may have felt, along with other Victorian males, that refined women should not have to

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suffer the indignities of sex. Or maybe his avoidance of decent middle-class women satisfied a need to make himself miserable. It is notable that he produced his best work during his two wretched marriages: while he was with Edith he wrote *New Grub Street*, *Born in Exile*, *The Odd Woman*, and *The Whirlpool* (a powerful story of a middle-class marriage ruined by the wife's artistic and social ambitions, and Gissing's first real popular success).

A less charitable interpretation is that he was interested only in women he could dominate and despise. Anthony West, the son of H. G. Wells, writes in his biography of his father that Wells, who became friendly with Gissing in the 1890s, found irrefutable proof in Gissing's papers that he had been an inveterate wife beater, driving his poor, meek spouses to drink and insanity. But since Wells tended to distort everything to his own advantage, and since he told this story as part of the dramatic saga of how he had trusted and helped Gissing only to be lied to throughout their friendship (he was peeved that Gissing had never told him of the conviction for theft), it is hard to know how much faith to place in this tale. All one can know for certain is that his wives were no happier with him than he was with them.

By the time his second marriage ended, Gissing's critical reputation seemed assured. Both Meredith and Hardy praised his work and made overtures of friendship, and Henry James, to whom Wells had introduced him, expressed a "persistent taste" for his novels, imperfect though he found them. James described Gissing to a friend as "quite particularly marked out for what is known in my profession and his as an unhappy ending."

But in the late 1890s Gissing believed that a happy ending was at hand. Shortly after he left Edith, Gabrielle Fleury, a young Frenchwoman, wrote to him about translating *New Grub Street*. She came to London to discuss the project with him, and after several meetings agreed to live with him as his wife. (No real marriage was possible while Edith still lived, but they underwent a ceremony in Paris for the sake of Gabrielle's parents.) It seemed that Gissing was about to find peace at last. Certainly Gabrielle was as refined as he could have wished—a little too consciously so, according to the unreliable Wells—and shared all his intellectual interests. From Gissing's

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letters to Bertz, it appears that their affection for each other never seriously wavered, despite various practical and pecuniary difficulties.

But, as Gabrielle came to see it, Gissing was congenitally incapable of happiness. And fate, which had dealt him so many blows in the past, now took on a slapstick cast and served him up an interfering mother-in-law. Madame Fleury, who lived with the pair first in Paris and then in St. Jean de Luz in the Pyrenees, seems to have been one of those excessively frugal French housewives whose first priority was keeping up appearances. She was indignant at the idea that the money Gissing gave her for household expenses should go for perishable items like food, and she probably disapproved of heavy English cooking. According to both Gissing and Wells, Gissing nearly starved to death.

A lung ailment that had plagued him for years now became worse. At one point he returned to England, for which he was always homesick, to get fattened up, a service the Wellses obligingly performed for him. He then spent a month at a private sanatorium and afterwards seemed much the better for it. But he was never to regain his strength entirely. In early December of 1903, after months of ill health and depression, Gissing caught a cold that turned into pleuritis and pneumonia. Wells, who had been summoned to his deathbed, argued with Gabrielle over how much Gissing should be fed and whether the windows should be opened. In this atmosphere of quarreling, on December 28, Gissing died in great agony.

Almost all the works Gissing produced in his last years—among them a critical monograph on Dickens—were enthusiastically received by the critics, and several of the novels of this period were popular successes as well. *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, the ruminations on life and art of a novelist who, after long struggle, inherits some money and retires to Devon, now seems merely flabby and tiresome. But the posthumously published *Will Warburton*, the tale of a well-bred young gentleman who loses all of his own and his widowed mother's money and is forced to become a grocer in a dreary London suburb, is still highly readable. Where many of Gissing's later books deal with the more rarified problems of moneyed people, here all his old preoccupations reappear: the degradations of poverty, the impossibility of winning the love of a well-brought-up young woman if one has neither money nor social position, the hypocrisy of the middle and upper middle classes, the vulgarization of art, the suffering of the sensitive man faced with the ordinary horrors of life in a commercial society.

Gissing's pessimism encompassed the future as well as his own age. The remarkable thing is that so many of his dour prophecies have proven accurate. In *New Grub Street*, he predicts a great success for a paper that will "address itself to the quarter-educated . . . the young men and women who can just read, but are incapable of sustained attention. . . . What they want is the lightest and frothiest of chit-chatty information—bits of stories, bits of description, bits of jokes, bits of statistics, bits of foolery." It sounds uncannily like *People* magazine.

In *Demos*, Hubert Eldon predicts that "grass and corn will be produced by chemical processes. There will not be one inch left to nature," and goes on to ask, "Do you imagine the twentieth century will leave one green spot upon the earth's surface?" And in *The Whirlpool*, we find this somber prognostication: "Mankind won't stand it much longer, this encroachment of the humane spirit. . . . We may reasonably hope, old man, to see our boys blown into small bits by the explosive that hasn't got its name yet." (In fact, Gissing's elder son was killed at the Battle of the Somme.)

But in the end the most powerful thing about Gissing's work is not its prophetic passages, nor even his emotional renderings of sensitive men and women struggling with harsh realities. What makes him a more important writer than has yet been acknowledged is that to read him is to have our reading of other nineteenth-century novelists subverted in some irrevocable way. Gissing takes the country house scenes, the London drawing rooms, the "colorful" life of Dickens's streets, the whole smooth and stately machinery of Victorian society, and makes one unnervingly aware of what it was like to be outside it: how it felt to be poor, desperate, frightened, exiled from cottage parlors and elegant sitting rooms alike. Reading Gissing's work, one suddenly realizes that not every-

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body had a place in the grand order of things; there were those who could neither ride with the hounds nor gossip about the neighbors nor even sit in the pub with their fellows. To discover Gissing is to become harrowingly aware of the gulf between what we know of Victorian England from our novel reading and the strangling reality of life in that time. The happy endings are exposed as falsehood; the satisfying convention by which redemption, resolution, the restoration of the moral order are achieved by the last page seems like mere evasion.

Gissing forces us to wonder, almost against our will, what life was like for the servants and laborers sprinkled throughout the novels of Trollope and James and Thackeray and Jane Austen. One begins to reconsider them, to think of them as rounded human beings rather than caricatures or mere shadows, and then perhaps to dislike their creators a little for failing to do so. All the bland assumptions about women, the workers, the poor that the reader accepts as a given in Victorian novelists, as though they can't be expected to have questioned such ideas, come up for a different kind of scrutiny after one has read Gissing.

It can be argued, of course, that Gissing's sense of social injustice would have disappeared if society had let him in—if instead of having been "born in exile," he had been accepted into those circles of grace he yearned for, with pretty women playing the piano for him. But, as he well knew, that was impossible. For if the aristocratic ideals he defended were to endure, society had to close its doors on this prickly ex-classics scholar who had been convicted of theft and sentenced to a month's hard labor, this man who had married a prostitute and then wanted to discuss Greek strophes with his own kind.

Despite his peculiar situation, Gissing cannot have been unique: there were other outsiders, others we would now call "alienated" from society, before alienation became the fashionable and vocal cliché it is today. What Gissing gives a reader is a sense of loneliness so vast that one can never again think of the Victorian Age as the coherent, harmonious society of our collective nostalgia. That may not sound like a purely literary achievement, but only in literature of a fairly high order can the voice of one man resound so powerfully as to subvert our sense of an entire age.

Impractical Criticism

I. A. RICHARDS: HIS LIFE AND WORK. *By John Paul Russo. Johns Hopkins University Press. $39.95.*

Reviewed by WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

"It is only with the greatest trepidation that one tackles Ivor Armstrong Richards at all," begins the chapter on Richards in Stanley Edgar Hyman's book about modern literary critics, *The Armed Vision*. Any treatment of Richards was bound to seem superficial, Hyman wrote, since Richards's learning "in almost every area of knowledge is so tremendous, his significance so great in half a dozen fields besides criticism," and the "brilliance and subtlety" of at least his earlier books so overpowering. Nevertheless Hyman was undaunted enough to produce fifty useful pages, summarizing and describing the work Richards had produced up to that point in 1948. Now, more than forty years later, John Paul Russo has given us an exhaustive and exhausting commentary on Richards's life and works (mainly on the works); its usefulness to readers is, however, questionable.

The physical book weighs more than three pounds, has 678 pages of text with more than four hundred words to the page, adding up to a word count approaching three hundred thousand. There are an additional 130 pages of notes, with the numbers of notes to individual chapters consistently reaching into the hundreds. The devoted hard work that went into this creation is not in the least in question. For years Mr. Russo conversed with Richards, lived with him and his wife Dorothy (whose extensive diary he had access to), and has been thoroughly conscientious in familiarizing himself not only with everything Richards wrote in criticism—and in "fields besides criticism" like psychology, semantics, aesthetics, cultural prophecy, poetry—but also, to great or lesser extents, with Richards's precursors, the many and various writers to whom he was especially indebted. Furthermore Russo has managed to stay vitally interested in his subject; his love and admiration

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for Richards shine out on every page, and he writes with affecting sympathy toward the successes—more often the failures—of Richards's grand schemes, particularly the enterprise of Basic English. Yet one's overall feeling is that the book is terribly disproportionate; that there was never a moment when Russo decided *not* to make use of a file card—never an idea or a comparison or a name that occurred to him but that he then decided to leave out rather than include. It's all grist for the enormous mill, and in the process a reader gets rather ground up.

Examples of what is excessive and off-putting in the book might begin with Russo's attempt to place Richards in large historical contexts. Preparatory to discussing *Science and Poetry*, Russo, with quick allusions to Descartes, Hobbes, and Vico, roots the division between science and poetry in the seventeenth century—after which the following sentence:

> The Enlightenment compounded science and reason with progress and human freedom; art was the handmaiden of myth, not an independent means to it. Romanticism revalued the irrational and nonrational upward and secured for art and culture many of the values that had once been the exclusive domain of religion; but the gulf between art and science did not narrow; it deepened.

Now one doesn't exactly "disagree" with such assertions, but neither is one moved to agreement. The main feeling induced is, rather, depression, as we are reminded of sentences we once constructed for the freshman history exam. (There is real bathos in that concluding "it deepened," with reference to the "gulf.") To write well about Richards, the master of nuance in poetry, a biographer needs more of an ear for the possibly rebarbative nuance of such a sequence of assertions.

Russo's eagerness to elucidate the way Richards's work hangs together results in another kind of overdoing it when, under the rubric "Equilibrium of Opposed Impulses" (with regard to Richards's critical books of the 1920s) he writes:

> Hints as to the direction in which Richards would proceed to depict "wholeness" in poetry are found in "Art and Science," with its "vastly complex systems"; in *The Foundations of Aesthetics*, where

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"synaesthesis" is contrasted with "oscillation," "irresolution," "deadlock," and "conflict"; and in *The Meaning of Meaning*, where "contrast, conflict, harmony, interinanimation and equilibrium" are found among certain combinations of words.

A footnote then identifies the specific passages, but we are less than tempted to pursue them, our minds having glazed over from the barrage of quoted terms. It's true that Russo is more impressed by what he calls "Richards's confident manipulation of contemporary psychology" than is a reader such as myself who finds the psychology parts of *Principles of Literary Criticism* and *Practical Criticism* less than compelling or essential. Consider in this respect the chapter from *Principles* titled, promisingly, "The Analysis of a Poem" in which we are provided with lists and diagrams of such poetry phenomena as "visual sensations," "tied imagery," "free imagery," "auditory verbal image," "emotions," and so forth. At only a couple of brief moments in the chapter are there references to lines from particular poems. And whatever value such terms may possess in Richards's own handling of them is substantially lessened when translated into Russo's paraphrased formulations.

In general, the book is glutted with dropped names. A discussion of "context" begins by informing us that "Elements of it are adumbrated by many writers, by Thucydides, Bacon, Locke, Bentham, and Dugald Stewart." I believe Russo here, even though, shamefully, I haven't read a word of Dugald Stewart. But to whom can such a sentence be of use? A relatively brief paragraph about how Richards's poetry—published late in his career—was received, contains thirteen references to what different critics said about it ("wispy exercises," "chirpy eupeptic pipings"). Less than famous names suddenly intrude themselves needlessly, as when in discussing Richards's use of the terms "tenor" and "vehicle" one hears, "They are, comments Liselotte Gumpel, 'no doubt the most widely known concepts for the designation of metaphor' (1984). [44]" In speaking of the "transition from primitive to advanced societies" (Russo is considering Richards's dealings with Plato and Homer), a one-paragraph parade of names begins with an unfamiliar one ("As Jack Goody has observed"), then moves on to the likes of F. M. Cornford, L. Lévy-Bruhl, B. R. Wilson, E. Cassirer, E. A. Havelock, M. McLuhan, W. Ong, K. Popper, through Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss, back to Jack Goody, and out by way of Lévi-Strauss (once more) and Robin Horton. Again, the reader is none the wiser for having met so many famous people.

Trying to sum up in perhaps an oversimplified way the problem with Russo's book, I realized that, in relation to works by Richards like the early *Meaning of Meaning* or the late *Beyond*—works I've never finished and have little grasp of—it did me no good to plow through Russo's lengthy treatments of them. Much better to sit down with *The Meaning of Meaning* and confront Richards directly. On the other hand, with relation to *Practical Criticism*, a book I have taught in courses and know well (and a book that Russo rightly terms Richards's masterpiece), I didn't need Russo to rehearse again what was second nature to me. It's also the case that, with Richards especially, the good and invigorating moments in his books occur with a momentary flare of wit, an individual sentence that strikes by its brash, insouciant confidence. Early along in *Principles*, a paragraph begins with the quite outrageous claim, "But indeed language has succeeded until recently in hiding from us almost all the things we talk about." ("Recently," thinks the reader, must be just about the time I. A. Richards happened on the scene.) Or there is the amused scorn with which, in *Practical Criticism*, he greets the student who had objected to "A child sitting under the piano" (in D. H. Lawrence's "Piano," it is an upright, not a grand piano) because he didn't see how a child could sit "under" a piano ("He could sit under the key board but not under the piano"). Richards pointed out that "even when with great acumen he has answered his question, he is not satisfied. Does he hesitate to enter the 'Underground' at West Kensington, or has he never taken shelter 'under a tree'?" Such moments, of which there are many in *Practical Criticism*, are worth a pound of psychology; but in Russo's earnest full-scaled exposition of each book, they get buried under the tent of verbiage.

In a fine essay on Richards, Helen Vendler called him "the most extraordinary teacher of poetry" she ever encountered. The most extraordinary teacher of poetry *I* ever encoun-

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tered was Reuben Brower, himself a student of Richards at Cambridge, whose vocabulary for talking about a poem (tone, speaker, attitude) was derived from Richards. Decades later the terms seem to me as indispensable as ever; yet I feel my own sense of Richards, on the basis of his books, to be incomplete, even a diminished one when compared to (as Brower and Vendler have insisted) what went on in his classes. Russo tellingly points out that Richards believed theory was for books, and practical analysis of texts for the lecture hall or classroom. As far as establishing and comparing ways in which poems or lines should be sounded, it is certainly true that we do things in class that we do only lamely and awkwardly in print. Describing the way Richards read aloud "The Extasie" or "To His Coy Mistress," Vendler notes that, in a sense, his work was done "once the powerful interpretation-through-enunciation had lodged itself in our ears." But in another respect it is too bad that Richards made the opposition between theory and practice as sharp as he did. Surely the case for confining analysis to the classroom need not be so absolute—as is demonstrated by the subtle and useful criticism of poetry given us by such contemporary critics as Donald Davie, Christopher Ricks, and Vendler herself.

The one book in which Richards really allowed himself to "do" practical criticism was the book of that title—and the one of his we keep returning to. In *Practical Criticism*, when Richards deals with matters of tone and rhythm, his own tonal manner is at its most rich. The odd combination of Arnoldian moral fervor toward poetry as one of the things for which "civilised man cares most" (poetry as a surrogate for religion) alternates with a sly, sardonic, slightly malicious "sporting interest" (his phrase from the introductory chapter) in the mistakes, crude responses, inhibitions, and aggressions of his students in their readings. Richards's conviction, as he states it at one point in the book, that "stupidity" was no simple quality but a matter of "complex inhibitions" made him as much a satirist of readerly follies as a salvationist preacher of poetry's high calling. A part of him, that is, really welcomed his students' "wrong" readings for the way—in the interests of exploring what it was like to read a poem—they made "even the most leaden-witted blockhead an object of interest." In *Practical Criticism*, as Richards commented briefly, sarcastically, often trenchantly on his students' "protocols," we witness the fruitful union of "psychology" with a brilliant reader's response to the words on the page. Nothing Richards was to do later, in his books, ever matched that unique achievement in the study of poetry.

The Secundo Primo

OTHER PEOPLE'S TRADES. *By Primo Levi. Translated by Raymond Rosenthal. Summit Books. $17.95.*

Reviewed by GABRIEL MOTOLA

Admired originally as much for his account of his life in Auschwitz as for his life as a chemist, Primo Levi is becoming the object of more and more scrutiny since his suicide in April 1987. Although most readers dismissed as utter nonsense the assertion that appeared in *The New Yorker* that Levi's suicide calls into question his literary achievement, the suicide itself hovers over the page as the reader tries to understand it in relation to his life and work. While none of the essays in *Other People's Trades* provides a tangible clue to his suicide, some essays touch on suicide in general and—especially for those who, like Levi himself, suffered an indelible upheaval in their lives—what he feels its causes may be. But suicide is only one of many topics he writes about in this remarkable collection of short pieces. From it, we are able to witness the workings of a mind that, despite its permanent scar, retained a deep sense of humor and wonder, a profound intelligence and sensitivity.

Primo Levi writes in the introduction that he has marveled at the world from different perspectives: "examining matters of technique with the eye of a literary man, and literature with the eye of a technician." In fact, this split simultaneity may well be the way he apprehended most areas of life. Rendered into English masterfully by Raymond

GABRIEL MOTOLA is a professor of English at Bronx Community College of the City University of New York. His essays and reviews have appeared in *Central Park*, *Southwest Review*, and *Midstream*.

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Rosenthal, translator of Levi's *The Periodic Table* and *The Drowned and the Saved,* this book is made up of forty short pieces, most of which are some nine hundred or so words long and were originally published during a roughly fifteen-year period in the Turin newspaper *La Stampa.*

Levi's essays here cover a range of topics that, broadly placed into three categories, form a kind of autobiographical whole, covering his childhood; his view of the natural and physical sciences; his reading and writing. Beginning the collection with "My House," Levi describes the apartment in Turin in which he has lived since birth, and for which he nevertheless has little or no affection. Levi acknowledges that a probable reaction to his sedentary nature, created by the lifelong residence on Corso Re Umberto, was not only his love of travel but also his setting much of his work in distant lands. This characteristically objective approach to life and things is further evidenced by his recognition that, while there are more beautiful houses and skins than his own, "it would seem to me unnatural to exchange them for mine." Thus, one learns early on that Levi prizes distant lands, though remaining rooted to his place of birth; that, though not sentimental about an object, he intimately knows its history and composition; that, though he recognizes in others greater beauty and sturdiness than his own, he would not exchange a thing with them because it would be "unnatural."

In a later essay, "Frogs on the Moon," Levi tells how, as children, he and his sister were initiated into the unknown world of nature. His parents rented a house on the outskirts of Turin for the summer so that the children could escape the heat and humidity of the city. He describes how the three summer months "brought with them an ever new contact with nature: modest grasses and flowers whose names it was pleasant to learn, birds with various songs, insects and spiders." Besides the lazy, at times boring, serenity of idyllic isolation, there was the lesson to be learned from the darker side of nature—darker because so viewed by children who, in personifying its creatures, are suddenly shattered by their apparent cruelty.

Gathering a dozen pollywogs that he brought home despite his mother's disapproval, Levi wanted to create an environ-

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ment that would nurture, as he called them, "our children." Innocently releasing them "throughout the garden-courtyard in search of water that wasn't there," the young boy and his sister pursued a particular pollywog that, sighted by a robin, was swallowed whole. "At that same instant," Levi concludes his essay, "the white kitten, our playmate . . . took a prodigious leap and seized the bird . . . : she only half-killed it, as cats do, and carried it off into a corner to play with its agony."

Whether Levi indulged in a bit of poetic license by making the kitten white—as did Robert Frost to the "innocent heal-all"—or he merely reported what was the case, the fact remains that children old enough to cultivate pollywogs are old enough to be susceptible to the pathetic fallacy. To them, as to the reader, the white "baby cat" playfully pouncing on and half-killing the orange-breasted robin that has just devoured the "baby frog" leaves a lasting image of total innocence perpetrating total cruelty. But by recalling the incident as he does, maintaining the detached distance of the natural scientist while portraying it through the senses of the still vulnerable child, Primo Levi sustains the artistic tension that characterizes his work.

In other essays, Levi discusses his interests in Yiddish, in his first computer, in birds, always doing so with the enthusiasm, the learning, and, above all, the exactness that distinguish all of his writing. In "The Language of the Chemists (I)," he writes: "Unlike all other trade languages, that of chemists . . . must be able to indicate with precision . . . more than a million distinct objects." But, as he describes in "The Language of Chemists (II)": "Now my trade is a different one, it is the trade of words, chosen, weighed, fitted. . . . Thus for me also the elements tend to become words, and instead of the thing, its name and the why of its name interest me acutely."

Through Levi's own description of it, we discover the process of his becoming a writer, not the writer who, as he himself asserted, first wrote to try to rid himself of the pain of his memories as well as "to bear witness," or even the one who recorded, in *The Reawakening*, the events immediately following his release from Auschwitz. The reader sees how the emotionally scarred writer developed into someone whose high consciousness of form and structure, as influenced by his scientific objectivity, whose intense awareness of art and society, as influenced by his experiences and his readings, was able to conceive and create such diverse works as *The Periodic Table*, *If Not Now, When?*, *The Monkey's Wrench*, and *The Drowned and the Saved*.

As a writer, Levi describes in "Ex-Chemist" his indebtedness to his former profession. He glosses over the fact that being a chemist saved his life at Auschwitz and provided him with a "reasonable livelihood" when he returned to Turin. What his training as a chemist gave him besides "an immense patrimony of metaphors . . . a precious source of raw materials," was the "habit of penetrating matter, of wanting to know its composition and structure . . . a mental habit of concreteness and conciseness, the constant desire not to stop at the surface of things." He concludes, "I write precisely because I am a chemist: my old trade has been largely transfused into my new one." But this should not be taken to mean that he believes the cold reasoning of the scientist must prevail over the sensibility of the artist.

In describing the making of *If Not Now, When?* in the essay "Writing a Novel," Levi says that, although he cannot define the "deeper consistency" that makes a character come to life, one knows if that consistency "has been respected . . . after the page is written, and the signal is given by the reader's blood, which for a few minutes circulates a trifle warmer and a trifle faster." Thus, contrary not only to many of his detractors but also to those admirers who believe he restrains his passions, for Primo Levi the ultimate test of a work of art is not calculated in the crucible but felt in the pulse.

What in fact almost makes Levi's blood boil is the deliberately equivocal artist. In "On Obscure Writing," one of the most significant essays in the book because of its depiction of his views on writing and on life as well as its mention of suicide and its relationship to the obscure writer, Levi's tone is at times uncharacteristically snappish and impatient. After beginning the essay with the assertion that he would not place restrictions of any kind on creative writers, he concludes with the reminder to the reader that "these are preferences of mine, not standards. . . . [W]riting not understood by its contemporaries may become clear and illustrious decades and centu-

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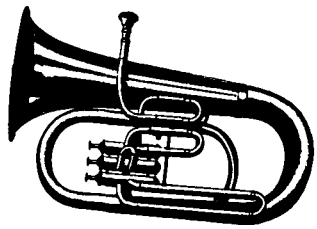

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ries later." Despite these provisos, the substance of the essay reveals his scorn for the writer who obfuscates: "He is wicked or at least a discourteous person, because he imposes labor, anguish, or boredom on his readers." This is not only the conviction of a scientist insisting on clarity; it is also that of a citizen of a modern democratic state who holds that deliberate obscurity is "an ancient repressive artifice, known to all churches, the typical vice of our political class, the foundation of all colonial empires."

Using Ezra Pound as an example of the deliberately obscure writer upon whom much praise has been lavished, Levi concedes that Pound may have been "a great poet." However, "In order to make sure he would not be understood at times [Pound] wrote in Chinese, and I am convinced that his poetic obscurity had the same root as his belief in the superman, which led him first to Fascism and then to self-alienation: both germinated from his contempt for the reader." If Levi condemns deliberate obscurity because of the inherent contempt its practitioner has for the reader, he finds unmeditated obscurity equally unacceptable, though he is sympathetic to the author who, psychologically or emotionally battered by traumatic changes in his world, is himself confused and bewildered.

Citing Georg Trakl and Paul Celan who, despite having committed suicide, must nevertheless be respected because they had ample cause to do so, Primo Levi states: "Their common destiny makes one think about the obscurity of their poetry as a pre-suicide, a not-wanting-to-be, a flight from the world, of which the intentional death was the crown." Of Celan, a German Jew who survived the Holocaust, Levi says his poetry "truly is a reflection of the obscurity of his fate and his generation." But that obscurity, even if it "attracts us as chasms attract us . . . also defrauds us of something that should have been said and was not." The responsibility of the writer is to "make sure that every word reaches its target." And though the painful irony is that Levi's luminous style was not enough to prevent him from taking his own life, his suicide in no way diminishes the substance or dims the lucidity of the writing, every word of which did, in fact, strike "its target."

In a typical mixture of humor and seriousness, Levi concludes *Other People's Trades* with "To a Young Reader," offering requested advice to a would-be writer: "After ninety years of psychoanalysis, and successful or failed attempts to pour the unconscious directly onto the page, I have an acute need for clarity and rationality. . . . A clear text is not perforce elementary; it can be read at several levels. . . . [W]riting means laying oneself bare. . . . Oh, I forgot to tell you that, in order to write, one must have something to write."

What the essays in *Other People's Trades* reveal is a mind acutely aware of the diverse social and political, the scientific and artistic, questions to which attention must be paid. With the "clarity and rationality" he insists all texts must contain, Primo Levi has elegantly bridged the two cultures, both of which he profoundly apprehends with equal portions of scientific intelligence and artistic sensitivity.

The Come Outer

BORDERLAND: ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN SUBURB, 1820–1939. *By John R. Stilgoe. Yale University Press. $35.*

Reviewed by NEIL HARRIS

For many years consigned to historical oblivion and scholarly contempt, American suburbs, like American cities before them, are gaining new attention. Indeed, as their longevity, variety, and continuing popularity have become more evident, a grudging respect for their powerful presence has also become apparent.

The process is not entirely unexpected and follows well-established patterns. In the 1950s it was still rare to find city life treated sympathetically or rigorously by historians of the United States. Richard Hofstadter began his 1954 classic *Age of Reform* by explaining that "the United States was born in the country and has moved to the city." Thus our political values had necessarily been "shaped by country life." A generation, the first generation really, of American Studies specialists

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devoted much of its time to analyzing a series of deeply ingrained literary tropes glorifying gardens, yeomen, economic independence, and frontier virtues, noting contradictions and deceptions along with rhetorical strategies.

They were followed, and complemented, by historians concerned with urban realities, producing, in the sixties, seventies, and eighties, an almost numberless set of monographs on urban transport, crime, demography, recreation, geography, government, politics, reform, ethnicity, migration, architecture, religion, as well as significant syntheses and broad narratives. It was inevitable that along with this scholarship there crept in, as there had in its rural counterpart, elements of sentimentalization, nostalgia, celebration, and justification.

Now a new group of researchers has begun to focus attention on a third landscape, whose historic roots and influences appear to entitle it to cultural status. In the last half-dozen years, Kenneth Jackson, Henry Binford, Robert Fishman, Michael Ebner, and a series of other scholars have reconfigured the suburbanization of the United States. They have produced both a set of specific studies of individual metropolitan areas and some comprehensive treatments, among which Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier* stands out. Much more remains to be learned, but our historical memory has already been much enlarged. The role of developers, of transportation and highway systems, of commuting patterns, building technologies, tract plans, government subsidies, mortgage policies, all of them incompletely understood and rarely studied decades ago, have begun to achieve definition. But until now no one has examined the suburban ideal itself, or argued that the dream of peopling this landscape between city and country has been a grand intellectual theme, one whose roots are as complex and deeply twined within our national past as the country-boy motif or the virgin-land concept.

No one, that is, until John Stilgoe in *Borderland*. Riding the crest of the new interest, Stilgoe, a Harvard historian who has previously published several books on attitudes to landscape and its human interventions, has proposed to chart the intellectual origins of the American suburb, from the early nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. His study, filled with illustrations from the books,

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magazines, pamphlets, and promotional materials honoring the redeeming power of the suburbs, establishes a lineage that is at once impressive and enticing. It also borrows from a series of books (and authors) who are not ordinarily admitted to such retrospective historical feasts—agricultural journalists, critics, housewives, commuters, horticulturists, etiquette advisers, ministers, travelers, and real-estate publicists—in the interest of establishing continuing themes, objectives, and anxieties. With plentiful quotation, of image as well as of word, Stilgoe argues (against the patronizing sarcasm and homogenizing satire of twentieth-century intellectuals) that the outer suburbs of American cities, the territory constituting his "borderland," represented a serious response to a new pattern of industrialized urbanization. That movement appealed to a powerful "come-outer" spirit in Americans. Stilgoe links the suburban migration to the colonizing efforts of the Puritans, westward movements across the prairies, transoceanic epics of immigrants, and other restless passions that helped to people this country.

But such spatial mobility also exposed a weakness that few patriots were willing to acknowledge: "the unwillingness of many Americans to succeed in a difficult place, to improve unfavorable conditions rather than flee them." Just "as most American immigrants bore the charge of cowardly desertion, so suburbanites bear it still." At its heart, the search for comfort epitomized by moving to the suburbs has seemed to many urbanites a form of withdrawal, even self-indulgence, which necessarily denies to the larger community the vigor, force, and strength of the separatists.

Having linked the quest for country living to grand social forces, Stilgoe largely abandons the critical implications he so persuasively attaches to the quest at the start, in favor of organizing anthologically the reflections, observations, suspicions, and modestly defined pleasures of what might be termed the suburban sensibility. Their images, not surprisingly, build around the attractions of a natural landscape served by the conveniences of modern technology—first by steam railroads, then by telegraphs, electric traction, telephones, and package delivery, and eventually by radio and automobiles. The advantages of the country could be enjoyed by those who worked in the city thanks to such inventions. Informed commentaries on the logic of railroad suburbs date back to the 1840s.

Indeed, there has not been a great deal of change over the years in the rhetoric of suburban publicists, which poses something of a problem for Stilgoe's account. While names, faces, and specific landscape applications alter, the argumentative thrust does not. From Susan Fenimore Cooper, daughter of the great novelist, and Alice Cary, writer of sentimental fiction, to such twentieth-century magazinists as Hilda Ward and Ethel Longworth Swift, borderland enthusiasts rhapsodized about the health, vigor, picturesque beauty, intelligent play, and natural pleasure possible in suburbia. All of these were counterposed to the incessant growth of modern cities and their parallelogram parks, more terrible in their homogenized, geometrized, mechanized residential districts than in their actual downtown infernos. Although the suburbanites spurned wilderness and farming as much as they did urbanism, they reserved their deepest anger and most caustic language for the city as a place of residence.

In the course of recording the suburban chorus, Stilgoe quotes a series of little-known observers of suburban mores, writers such as Frederick S. Cozzens, R. B. Coffin, Henry Cuyler Bunner, and John Preston True, who, along with more celebrated authors such as William Dean Howells and Nathaniel Parker Willis, addressed the "incredible complexity" of borderland life—a set of challenges to mind, management, and imagination every bit as comprehensive if different from those posed by cities. Even in the 1860s chroniclers were noting the ironies and special hazards attached to commuter life, the novel rituals that required development, the new social roles offered to women who shaped the suburbs far more powerfully than they were able to order the cities. The borderland aesthetic, with its worship of particular kinds of trees, flowers, and shrubs, possessed its own codes and standards, very different from the "sentimental" love of wilderness, on the one hand, or the formality of urban plantings on the other. Such landscape architects as Edward Payson Powell and Wilson Flagg developed justifications for their sun-traps and recesses, their hedges and leafy retreats that brought privacy (particularly to borderland women),

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encouraged spontaneity, permitted invigorating exercise, and sheltered one from the wind and hot sun. Proper plantings not only shielded residents from the effects of weather but also from the prying eyes of neighbors or curious passersby. The rhetoric emphasized peace, quiet, seclusion. "Love of nature endured in the borderlands," Stilgoe writes, "but the love enfolded and masked the ever more powerful love of outdoor privacy, of visual separation from pointers and other strangers, of stepping back from views of factories and cities, of spontaneous enjoyment of outdoor space."

The taste for borderland settings spurred on real-estate developers and planners alike, although Stilgoe insists that some of their most elaborate and best-financed efforts failed by reason of their very comprehensiveness and specificity. Reviewing, for example, the creation of Forest Hills Gardens, established upon a large farm in Queens by the Russell Sage Foundation just before World War I, Stilgoe argues that the "first deliberately photogenic residential development" in the United States was simply too finished, too complete, too communitarian in its arrangements. Such a "wholly designed place nearly unable to accept change" contrasted with other borderland developments, such as Cleveland's Shaker Heights, which was just as carefully controlled but less dependent upon cooperative arrangements and more on the advantages of large, expensive houses, convenient roads and utilities, and high-speed commuting. "Speculators succeeded where philanthropy failed." Forest Hills Gardens smacked too much of the company town, and according to Stilgoe, borderland residents mistrusted large-scale corporate capitalism and relief from commercial structure.

Stilgoe emphasizes that much revulsion from the city was in good part a distaste for bustle, poster hoardings, crowded shopping districts, and garish advertising, in favor of natural understatement and protection for home and garden. The origins of the American suburb, then, lie in a sensibility that prized aristocratic, or at least pre-capitalist, virtues—leisure, privacy, withdrawal, independence—even while the money to afford the neo-medieval and colonial revival residences with their beautifully landscaped grounds came from the metropolis.

Stilgoe doesn't dwell on the apparent contradictions, although he seeds the doubts in a reader's mind. There are moments when he seems too concerned with dignifying the suburban quest, so long derided or patronized. In some ways the suburban story resembles the yeoman myth: borderland migrants repudiating (rhetorically) the system that nurtured their existence, prizing homogeneity, conformity, respectability, and controlled picturesqueness while rebelling against external control or communal arrangements. The medley of oddly paired ideals—punctuality and back to nature, comfort and challenge, natural beauty and eclectic revivalism, individualism and circumscribed variety—looks more like a response to disorder than an achievable set of goals.

Stilgoe ultimately ties the "enduring power of borderland landscape" to a vision broader and higher than the frenetic tyranny of our cities. Although he ends his survey in the 1930s, Stilgoe casts a baleful eye on the city of the 1980s, predicting an end to the back-to-the-city movement and an acceleration of suburban growth. Crime, crowding, astronomical rents, and psychological overload are leading even the most urbane of urbanites to smother their embarrassment and guilt and rediscover what others before them knew: that suburban migration could restore "some fragment of natural order" to their lives. If it means abandoning the city, so be it. They are simply acting from a long tradition, the "come-outer" ethos that Stilgoe finds present in the earliest periods of English settlement of North America, and there is nothing really to be ashamed of in this.

The contradictions and many of the darker implications of this large migration must be teased out of the narrative, because Stilgoe's interest lies more with the recovery of texts than with the definition of ideology. The difference between ingenuous and disingenuous doesn't seem to exist in *Borderland,* nor is there any lively sense of paradox or irony. Nor, for that matter, of tragedy. Has anything gone wrong? Is the vision flawed? Does it really penalize the metropolis? And what does the suburban vision insinuate for the separations of class and race that distort our social landscape? These questions are never posed. Stilgoe has deemed it sufficient to provide a degree of paternity for today's sub-

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urbanites, and to offer reassurance by connecting current yearnings for security and serenity with an older tradition. The absence of larger discussion robs the book of some of its persuasiveness and underscores some apparent infatuation on the author's part with an occasionally unending medley of suburban accents. But, as an evocation of a broadly held American dream that deserves serious consideration, *Borderland* is nonetheless an impressive performance.

The Toughest Subject

FROM THAT PLACE AND TIME: A MEMOIR, 1938–1947. *By Lucy S. Dawidowicz. Norton. $19.95.*

Reviewed by DAVID VITAL

Nothing is so difficult—and perhaps nothing *should* be so difficult—as for a historian of modern Jewry to deal with the world that the Germans pulverized in the course of the Second World War.

Were it only the matter of elegant, subtle, intellectually and artistically avant-garde life in pre-war Vienna—Stammtische, Gemütlichkeit and all—it could be (as it repeatedly has been) treated more or less in the melancholy spirit of Stefan Zweig's *Die Welt von Gestern*. But Eastern Europe, where most of the Jews were—and most of the Jews of Vienna, and of the United States, too, of course, came from—was always otherwise. It is one of the merits of Lucy Dawidowicz's recollections of Vilna in the last year before the war broke out and that city and its Jewish inhabitants were all but totally destroyed that Eastern Europe is presented properly, in true terms, light and shade, warts and all.

Through the eyes of a young woman of twenty-four we see, for example, the horrendous, soul-destroying poverty in which so much of Vilna's Jewry languished. It had been said of them in the previous century that as

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many as one-third did not know on any one day whether there would be anything to eat on the morrow. Things were no better in 1938.

As we were walking through the serpentine streets of the old ghetto area, we were accosted by a swarm of beggars. They besieged us on every side. Ragged children chased after us, screaming for a grosz—the Polish equivalent of a penny. . . . The beggars were unwashed, foul-smelling, a rough lot. They were dressed in layers of tatters that had once been clothing. Some didn't have shoes, but had swaddled themselves as though begging were an established occupation and it was their legitimate business to beg and ours to give alms. At first they pleaded, whined, and wheedled. When we didn't readily respond, they became abusive and began to curse volubly in pungent Yiddish idioms.

Mrs. Dawidowicz had grown up in very straitened circumstances in the Depression years in New York City. But nothing had prepared her for the hovels and filth and smells of pauperdom that she encountered in Poland, nor for the shock. "Everything I loved in Vilna," she writes in retrospect (or, possibly, quoting one of her many letters home on which much of her present account is based), "rested upon a rotten crumbling foundation."

Nor had there been much in America (hardly philo-Semitic in the 1930s) to prepare her for the violence, mindlessness, and general nastiness (what other word will do?) of the Polish anti-Semitism of the time. Virtually from top to bottom, at least since the death of Pilsudski—a man of some principle in his time—the Jews were being hammered and hammered again: in their daily life, in their attempts to scrape a livelihood together, in the streets, in their homes, in politics, and, perhaps most tellingly of all, in the universities, too, where hooliganism, beatings, numerus clausus, and public expressions of contempt and hatred by faculty and students were rife.

For, by and large, the Poles had convinced themselves that they desperately wanted the Jews out of the country; and the more patriotic they were, the more earnestly they were moved to be rid of them, either by physical and mental harassment, by economic boycott, or by every means they could find within the loose bounds set by a legal system administered by hostile police and complaisant judges, since the tone was set by a government only fleetingly concerned with its reputation abroad. If German Jews were desperately slow to take the measure of the post-1933 regime in Berlin, Polish Jews, with rare exceptions, had long known the nature of the beast with which they had to contend. Thus throughout Poland. Thus in Vilna.

Why should a young girl, newly out of college and anxious to make her way in, or fairly close to, the American academic world, travel to Vilna, of all places, rather than, if overseas, less dangerously to Paris and London, like everyone else? Why to the Jewish heartland so late in 1938, when Austria had already been incorporated into the new Germany, when the pressure was now on Czechoslovakia, and the anti-Semitic winds across all Europe were at their highest?

It is an interesting and unusual case. The young Lucy Dawidowicz had been introduced to, and been captivated by, the contemporary secular-cultural, national revival in Jewry as she had come to know it in New York, but not as it was most commonly articulated in the United States then and now—where, in one way or another, it has meant acculturation through learning English and a stab at full accommodation to America. The Jewish revival as it had evolved in Europe, notably Eastern Europe, since at least the middle of the previous century, seems to have caught her imagination at the time. But nor was it, in her case, the powerful Hebraist trend, which had already successfully established itself in Palestine and had been one of the great forces fueling the Zionist movement from the start. It was rather the Yiddishist trend—one should say, in retrospect, the counter-Zionist one. For it was based on the twin propositions that the principal language of the Jews was not only Yiddish in fact, but would and should remain so; and that the *locus* of most Jews was not only quite evidently Eastern Europe at the time, but equally would remain so.

That in our own times neither proposition holds and that even before the destruction of European Jewry the social and cultural, let alone political and physical, viability of the Jews in lands that they had inhabited for a thousand years or more was increasingly doubtful was of course neither here nor there so far as the dedicated and the faithful of the old Yiddishist creed were concerned. No single institution embodied such faith in the social, secular rehabilitation of Jewry, as

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much in the Jews' own eyes as in the eyes of others, through the establishment of Yiddish as the Jews' language of high culture in all domains, as the Yiddish Scientific Institute, or, as it is better known, the YIVO. Since its foundation after the Great War, YIVO had established itself as the preeminent powerhouse of the time for the systematic historical, demographic, and sociological investigation of Jewry and for such parallel and ancillary activities as the teaching and refining of the Yiddish language, the preparation of cadres of young scholars, and bibliographical research. It was a sort of open research university. Its work was of the highest academic order, its leaders often of the utmost distinction. Its headquarters, its library, its principal group of researchers were all in Vilna.

This was entirely appropriate. In the eyes of the Jews of Eastern Europe, Vilna was a city of quite exceptional, notably intellectual, prestige. (It was also the object of an angry, occasionally violent dispute between Poland and Lithuania, each of which claimed it for its own.) True, on the face of things, Vilna was much like other largish Polish cities, so many of which had a similarly mixed population. In Vilna, the Jews constituted about a third of the population, which was dominated, inevitably, by Poles but included Byelorussians, Germans, Lithuanians, and some Russians as well. It was not an easy place for any group, but least of all for the Jews. So far as their Polish masters were concerned, the Jewish community was an excrescence to be got rid of and a body to be milked of whatever financial and economic gains that could be extracted from it by threats, or by force if necessary, ultimately by playing on the Jews' fatalistic quietism and intense desire to be allowed to get on with their lives. Because that was the case, the inner life of Vilna Jewry was distinctive.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century it had been one of the great centers of Talmudic learning, its glory being the finest Talmudic scholar of the age: Rabbi Elijah, the Vilna *Ga'on*. Vilna Judaism was still, generally speaking, of a highly orthodox, rigorously intellectual kind: quite remote from the softer, mystical variety much favored elsewhere in Poland. But there was an equally celebrated, secular, not to say anti-clerical and class-oriented trend in Vilna as well. The Bund—the

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revolutionary, Marxist, but intensely Jewish workingman's movement, at one time a constituent of Lenin's Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (later to be crushed in Russia by the same Lenin but still exceedingly strong in independent Poland)—had been founded in Vilna and was led from it for many years. Again, Vilna was one of the mother cities of the Zionist movement in Eastern Europe (along with Odessa and Warsaw). For many years before the revolution, Vilna had been the seat of the (illegal) central office of the Russian Zionist Federation. That Vilna should be the seat of the deeply anti-Zionist YIVO as well was in its way natural and comprehensible to all. If Russo-Polish Jewry had constituted a territorial nation, Vilna would have been its natural capital.

There is much of value in these chapters of Mrs. Dawidowicz's book in which her experience in Vilna, from her arrival in the summer of 1938 to her hurried departure the following year, only days before the German invasion of Poland, is related; she conveys its extraordinary mixture of powerful, but largely incompatible, social trends and political ideologies most effectively. She captures splendidly not only the spirit and the vitality of the Jewish intelligentsia of Vilna, along with its variety and its contradictions, but also its characteristic seriousness and intensity.

The rest of her book, alas, is less successful—except perhaps for the very last chapter in which she recounts her involvement in the post-war effort to salvage remnants of the YIVO library (parts of which had been taken to Germany by the invaders). Her chronicle of the war itself, interspersed between her own private responses to events as reports from Europe washed up from time to time on the eastern shores of the United States, is sadly below the standard she herself has set elsewhere. Her occasional references to efforts in the United States to do something for the salvation of European Jewry lack the clarity of vision, firm judgment, and proper articulation this exceedingly painful subject surely deserves if it is to be tackled at all. In such a well-known specialist as Mrs. Dawidowicz in the grim matter of the death of the Jews of Europe, this is particularly disappointing. After some oblique remarks on the all-but-fruitless appeals for action addressed to Washington, and to the president in particular, it comes as a shock to see Roosevelt referred to, without further elaboration, as "our protector." But if this long, middle section of the book is a disappointment, and Mrs. Dawidowicz's occasional jabs at people she disappoves of (Zionists mostly) tend to jar, the first, wholly autobiographical section on Vilna does remain a historical document for which we may be grateful.

What we should be especially thankful for is the author's honest attempt to look squarely at a particular corner of the world of yesterday neither sentimentally, nor nostalgically, nor in an effort to prettify it as an urban version of life conceived of in *Fiddler on the Roof* terms, as it were, but rather as a very mixed affair, as it had to be, some of it unsightly, some of it mean, but much of it enormously decent, promising, and commanding of respect. It reminds us that the loss of Vilna and of so many other centers of authentic Jewish life is irreparable, that there is and can be nothing like it again. Mrs. Dawidowicz's book not only tells us about a young woman who left New York for inter-war Poland just as that world was about to be extinguished, it tells us quite a bit about that world itself that deserves to be more widely known and seen in a truer light than has been customary.

Value Talk

A FREE AND ORDERED SPACE: THE REAL WORLD OF THE UNIVERSITY. *By A. Bartlett Giamatti. Norton. $19.95.*

Reviewed by CLIFFORD ORWIN

This book appeared while Dr. Giamatti was president of the National League, on the eve of his ascent to the commissionership of baseball and so just a few months before his untimely death. It consists of twenty-four essays, most of them speeches dating from his presidency of Yale. It offers an eloquent memorial to the emphasis on liberal education that distinguished Giamatti from the presidents of most major universities.

Some of the addresses collected here were delivered to Yale alumni or to this or that

CLIFFORD ORWIN is a professor of political science at the University of Toronto.

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professional meeting, topical conference, or public panel. These tend to be the blunter of the pieces here collected, and much in them is sound and useful. Their general theme is the role of the university in the broader society, and the paradox that only by retaining its independence from society can the university best serve it. Giamatti discusses the proper role of athletics on campus, and various aspects of the relationship of academia to government and business. He pleads with both government and business to support the university generously and with few strings attached. Unfortunately these pleas, accompanied by appropriate lamentations, date mostly from the Carter years, when a malaise hung over the American people, and most thickly over their universities, as a result of rampant stagflation. Now that universities are again flush, evocations of the pains of retrenchment seem dated.

The other speeches here were originally directed to student audiences at Yale. Most were either orientation or commencement addresses; Giamatti was forever saying hello or good-bye. He, to his credit, took his task as orator seriously. His passionate, eloquent articulations of the mission of the university manage, without making great demands on the audience, to uplift and satisfy. Many of the students may have left thinking that they had heard something wonderful and feeling renewed in their faith that they would learn (or had learned) something really important at Yale.

These addresses to students suffer, however, from a predictable defect: they are relentlessly edifying. They are short on irony and wit and long on high-minded exhortation and deploration. Giamatti aimed to inspire his audiences without much risk of displeasing them. This is hard to quarrel with, given the occasions. I witnessed a commencement in 1970 at which the first orator blasted the parents for complicity in every possible misdeed, and the second one reassured the graduands that, even so, peaceful change was possible, as these same parents were sure to die fairly soon. Giamatti's addresses fault neither students nor parents nor Yale itself. They do tend to avoid strong stands on contentious issues. (Giamatti reserved his strongest invective for the Moral Majority, which can hardly have been a major force at Yale in 1985.) We

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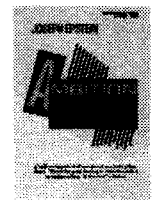

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hear repeatedly that discrimination on all the disapproved grounds is bad, and that Yale will have no truck with it, and that to study something for its own sake is good, and that this is what Yale is all about. Giamatti says these things about as well as anybody could.

One senses in these speeches to students, then, despite their many admirable qualities, a certain reluctance to talk turkey. While this would not have detracted from their effectiveness as speeches, it is somewhat disappointing, given Giamatti's stated purpose in collecting them in the present volume. In an introductory essay, the only wholly new part of the book, he states his motive for publishing this collection: chagrin at a problem, the symptom of which is the enormous popular success of a book highly critical of the universities, Allan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*. Not, of course, that Giamatti envied this success, but it attests the failure of American universities to explain themselves adequately to their public. Giamatti, then, offered his book as an antidote to Bloom's. Unfortunately, he nowhere makes clear just where he takes himself and Bloom to disagree, since they are both staunch defenders of liberal education. (His huffy two-sentence dismissal of a caricature of Bloom's argument does not suffice in this regard.) Even more to the detriment of his book, he has paid no attention to Bloom's analysis of the *objections* to liberal education today, an analysis far more searching and radical than his own.

Now Giamatti admitted that the problem facing the universities is not just that they have not adequately restated their mission in the past generation, but that they have not rethought it. It is just here, however, that this collection most disappoints. For Giamatti's defense of liberal education proves to be nowhere near new enough; it has not bridged the generation gap between the fifties and the eighties. He seems to have been unaware that, in today's wars over liberal education, we academics have met the enemy and he is us.

Giamatti's title states an ideal; his subtitle proclaims it a reality. His book then is optimistic—or, more precisely, defensive. There is nothing really wrong with the universities, it seems, save their own inability to grasp and state what is right with them. What is right with them is that they continue to offer a liberal education. Giamatti's notion of this latter draws heavily (as he noted) on Cardinal Newman's *Idea of a University*. Whether one's education is liberal depends not so much on what one studies as on the spirit in which one studies it. The key is to study it for its own sake, although with an eye to benefiting the community no less than oneself. There is no tension between these two aspects, because studying a subject for its own sake makes one a better person and citizen, and it is for this and this alone that society should look to a liberal education. Giamatti was aware that undergraduate education today is overwhelmingly pre-professional, but he manfully holds up his end of the argument that the best pre-professional education is a non-professional one—that one should prepare for becoming an MBA by becoming something more than an MBA.

So far, so good. The problem is that Giamatti failed to address the really burning question besetting liberal education today. That is the status of the canon, those relatively few works, most of them rather old, which past generations revered as the core of a liberal education. He does pronounce in favor of education based on texts, and presumably lacks enthusiasm for those debunkers or "deconstructors" of texts whose school has become synonymous with Yale. It seems that he favored a broadened and updated version of the canon, in which there is a place for new books as well as old ones, and for the natural and social sciences as well as the humanities. As to the proper approach to these, here it seems he would invoke what he called civility. By this he meant not, as he rightly stresses, gentility, or a reluctance to join issues, but a candid and passionate insistence on so doing, while excluding from the fray any coercion of those who disagree with oneself.

Now Giamatti was certainly aware that all is not well with liberal education these days. He knew that the teachers lack conviction and that students are bored, restless, and even truculent. He knew that the public (including parents) has become suspicious of what goes on under cover of liberal education. He seemed, however, to be at a loss as to why the malaise is so persistent, and as to why it infests liberal education in particular. He tended to ascribe the difficulties facing liberal

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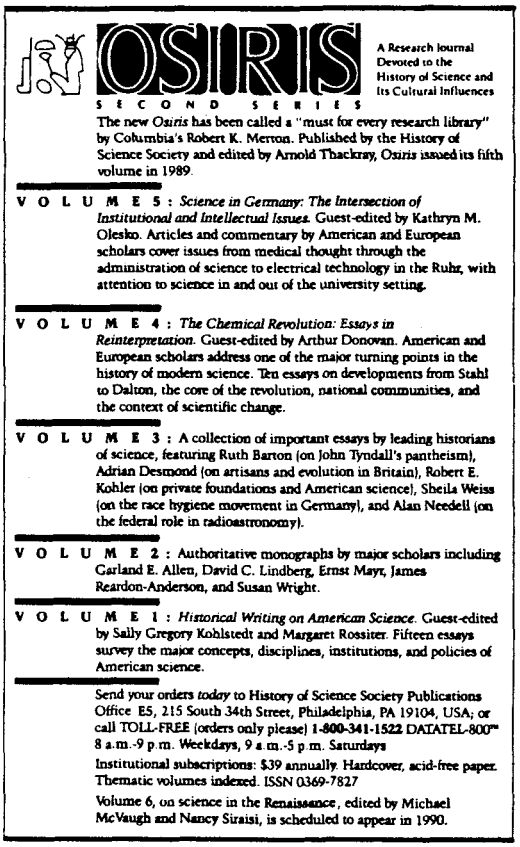
education to unwholesome influences from without the university or to the griping of various fringes within it. Unfortunately, the problem is bigger than that.

The university is the institutional expression of the notions guiding intellectual inquiry at a given epoch; it is of all institutions the most sensitive to such notions. The beliefs ascendant in it today do not support but subvert liberal education. While Giamatti bemoans unhelpful demands from both the Left and the Right within the university, the beliefs to which I refer transcend the distinction between left and right. They originated in the European ultra-modern or radical or atheistic right, a right which was not conservative but immoderately progressive, whose chief figures were Nietzsche and Heidegger. They have been, however, fully naturalized on the intellectual Left, which remains Marxist in name only. They are equally the common coin of "liberalism" today. Their current academic manifestation is programs like Stanford's, which gut liberal learning in the name of renewing it.

One of the shorthand terms signaling acquiescence in the general outlook in question is "values," a term that recurs in Giamatti's addresses depressingly often—more often, I believe, than any other significant term. His standard defense of liberal education is that it is surpassingly value-rich. True, we have come to expect value babble on solemn occasions, especially academic ones. Even so, it is painful to hear it from Giamatti. He erred profoundly in thinking that this particular jargon is useful to, let alone affords a definitive vindication of, the cause of liberal education. It may have seemed so thirty years ago, but the times they have a-changed.

Whoever talks about values does so in conscious preference to talking about possible truths. (The latter were formerly the coin of champions of liberal education.) Values are of course not possible truths: the very first thing to know about them is that they are neither true nor false; nor, accordingly, are any more true or more false than any other. Rather all are "relative" to those who hold them or they are a matter of arbitrary preference.

Among the problems with this view of the world as applied to the university is that the question of *what* values ought to have ascen-



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dance inevitably collapses into that of *whose*. If all values are equal and all who hold them are equally entitled to those that they hold, then what right has the university to "privilege" (as the saying goes) the values of some over those of others? (Especially if the some are "white Anglo-Saxon males," mostly of past ages, while the others are women or "people of color" or others in the university today who combine a claim to victimhood with sharper elbows than other university "constituencies.") And is liberal education itself, featuring as it does primarily the achievements of white males, anything but the flagship of the exclusionary, imperialistic, and elitist values of white males?

It amuses me when disgruntled students cast Sophocles and Plato as white males, as if the Greeks experienced themselves as white. (It amuses me more when the same students dismiss them as "white Anglo-Saxon males.") The very notion of a liberal education necessarily depends on upholding the view that there have been genuine thinkers with a claim to our attention as thinkers, not just as silver-tongued spokesmen for the "values" of this or that race, gender, class, or epoch. I like to commend to students bent on washing their hands of white Anglo-Saxon males the now quaint views of W. E. B. Du Bois.

> I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas. . . . From out of the caves of evening . . . I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn or condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil.

Du Bois evidently held to the existence of a true human common ground and peak to which all could equally aspire even if those who had ascended it so far had not yet included a prescribed quota of members of one's own ethnic group. Such a view of liberal education as truly liberating is ultimately incompatible with the reduction of the human to the realm of arbitrary values which each must defend because they are his own—or abjure out of guilt or disgust with his own.

Giamatti's emphasis, again, is not on what should be studied but on the spirit in which it should be studied, whatever it is. Unfortunately this begs the question. For just if liberal education consists of studying things for their own sake, it implies (if it implies anything) some persuasive answer to the question of what if anything is worth studying for its own sake. Not everything is so, and among those things that are, not everything is equally so. Liberal education depends on the notion that there is a large handful of works of permanent relevance to human beings as such, through the study of which these can gain greater perspective on their own time than that time enjoys on itself. It depends therefore on the notion of permanent human questions. If there are no such works that manage to speak to the human condition as such, there can be no liberal education; there can be only indoctrination or "consciousness raising" in the ways of one's own culture or subculture.

Liberal education further supposes that we can learn from old works, that (as Du Bois thought) a meeting of minds is possible, that we can find something in old works other than what we ourselves put there. A real sense of the necessity of learning must be bolstered by an openness to its possibility if liberal education is to seem serious. Only thus can we praise it, as Giamatti repeatedly does, as that

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crown of liberal democracy which fashions citizens who are free because their minds are.

Reduce liberal education to value soup, and you might as well close the kitchen. There remains no reason why a university whose student body is 13 percent Hispanic-American should not agree to field a core curriculum of 13 percent Hispanic-American writers. For no one any longer expects to learn anything important from this exercise (I mean about the good, the true, the just, and the beautiful, about what matters most to them as human beings). Instead each "constituency" bristles at any implied suggestion that its values and "experience" are less rich than those of any other group. (It *can't* be true that Plato is more worth studying than Alice Walker. Plato was a *white male.*) Each group (except white males, who must do penance) bargains or jostles with the others for its rightful share of the curriculum. This last in turn becomes a skewed sampler of current positions, ephemeral and highly ideological, with each group required to display its sensitivity to the others and poised to exact the same for itself. No one looks to ascend from the opinions of his own day and milieu, but only to get his claims in for the sake of boosting group self-esteem. Plato may survive, however wanly: a few old books add a touch of class, and he is said to have been homosexual, even to have anticipated feminism. Dante, however, will go, because he was white, male, heterosexual, Western and Christian, and because Italian-American males lack both the determination and the clout as victims that it would take to preserve him. As for coercion, which Giamatti rightly brands as anathema to a university, only the boldest administrator will punish it today where its aim was to make education more "responsive" to the demands of approved minorities. The curriculum becomes a political football, and liberal education a bad joke.

I am sure that Giamatti was no happier about any of this than I am. I honor the fervor of his commitment to liberal education. I see the patient as much sicker than he did, and he offered as a cure infusions of what I take to be the affliction, the alluring but empty rhetoric of values.

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by VICTOR FARÍAS

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The Reader Replies

Remembering Renan

Wallace Fowlie's article "Remembering Renan" (Spring 1989) was enjoyable but somewhat misleading. Reflections on his relationship with Ernest and Cornélie Renan's youngest daughter, Noémi, were warm and subtle. However, his essay did not present a correct picture of one of its central themes: 16 rue Chaptal, Renan's Parisian home after his marriage to Mme Scheffer in 1856. This is primarily because Professor Fowlie addresses a certain phase of the house's history but neglects to mention that it no longer remains the same.

During the crest of the French Revolution's bicentennial, I toured Les Musées de la Ville de Paris, a group of small to moderately sized museums, of which La Maison Renan-Scheffer is a member. (There are twelve more official members, but only two are homes of other literary figures—Balzac and Victor Hugo.)

As Professor Fowlie points out, Renan's home was built by his wife's uncle, Ary Scheffer, a respectable French painter. Nevertheless, Scheffer's artistic talents were apparently subordinated because of Renan's powerful volumes on the history of Christianity. As a result, the home has been known as La Maison Renan-Scheffer for a number of years. Moreover, it now bears a superior title of Musée de la Vie romantique due to an incorporation of memorabilia or mementos belonging to the life and work of George Sand, a literary giant who lived in several locations throughout rue Chaptal. In fact, the Sand display dominates the first floor of this wonderful home or *musée*.

Memorabilia related to Ernest Renan are primarily limited to a single room on the second floor. Basically, these consist of a genealogical tree, a few photographs of the scholar and his family, as well as a vitrine containing early editions of his classic works. Of particular interest to Renan aficionados are two front-page newspaper cartoons. The first appeared in *Le Bouffon* (October 20, 1867). It depicts Renan sitting on a stack of his most controversial publications flanked by outstretched bat wings. The second, from *Le Petit Journal* (September 27, 1903), pictures open resistance by some of the Tréquier townspeople to his posthumous return to Brittany, his birthplace.

It is here, in the northwestern part of France, that many will satisfy their empirical interests in Renan. For Tréquier, as Professor Fowlie notes, is "the site today of a museum and pilgrimage, called *La Maison Renan.*" The Paris home, by comparison, can be considered seductively misleading and even a disappointment for those who long for material links to Renan's "presence." This is very understandable. Such satisfaction is not easy in the overwhelming midst of Sand's artifacts or Scheffer's portraits.

However, if you can "see" beyond those attractive surroundings, a spiritual reality of Renan can be felt throughout this small museum. I believe this is the subjective sense that Dr. Fowlie alludes to in his closing comments on Renan's *Prière sur l'Acropole.* The ending of the scholar's prayer is indicative of such a dimension: "Everything on this earth is symbol and dream." At 15 rue Chaptal, Ernest Renan dreamt many dreams and interpreted countless symbols for those who desire such insight.

David M. Moss, III
Atlanta, Georgia

Errata

In "The Dead Sea Scrolls—An Exchange" (Autumn 1989), the editors regret the following four errors:

On page 626, paragraph two, the following text was omitted after the word "fragments": " . . . of scrolls found in Cave 1 in 1949, but 'several hundred' were reported by the excavators, bringing to 990 the total fragments. . . . "

On page 627, column one, line 23, after the word "Qumran," these words were omitted: " . . . had expected for almost 200 years did not occur, most of the men of Qumran. . . ."

On page 627, fourteen lines from the bottom of column one, "by the Metropolitan's A. Y. Samuel" should read "by Metropolitan A. Y. Samuel."

On page 629, column one, paragraph one, "1988" should be "1955."

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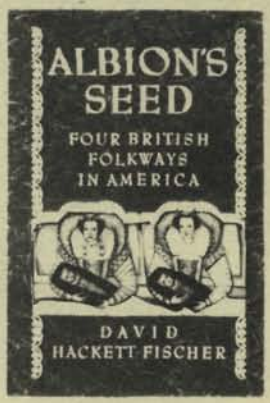

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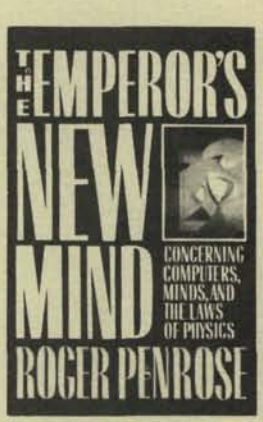

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